

CHAPTER II

Life, Liberty, the Pursuit on the College Campus

The horizons at college are ever widening for the young freshman. His flights of thought and fancy ever soar higher - beyond the campus. For this is a new world, and inspiring. New faces, new characters, and bevy of new and attractive young females.

Time and the pursuit of happiness.

But there is also that moment's pause for the twitch of nostalgia - with the narrowing^{orb} of the sun's path in the sky, the early twilight, the first autumn chill - for the familiar home scenes. The heart hesitates a bit perhaps, and skips a beat with the trepidation of expectancy and the new experience. But not for long, for the new Alma Mater, Bocly, presents her smiling new face to you: the varnish on the benches, desks and ~~case~~ woodwork; the new paint on the walls and the calcimine on the ceiling; the fresh new spring in the old prof, and the fresh clean-shaven pampered face of the young prof; the shine and eagerness in the eye of both, student and professor. The busy whirlpool of life in the "halls" and on the campus gives your spirit a mighty fillip.

And above all the cry of the campus.

Campus, campus, campus!

Prexy, prexy, prexy!

Rah, rah, rah!

The cry of the campus, the sheltering campus, the Mother-Campus, the multi-faced campus:

The crunch of the dry leaves on the gravel walks in the crisp autumn air. The nodding branches overhead shedding their leaves, bronze-brown, yellow and blood-red, with the sun in them. The swish of the wet grass under foot, with the dew of the morning or evening in them. The august brownstone buildings, and the buff bricks; the greystone of the Gothic chapel; the three-story geology structure, which also houses the department of physics, with its glass cupola of the Observatory scanning the sky. The newest and most modern structure (next to the Torbets Dormitory, named for the president,) is that of the Department of Chemistry. It stood large and isolated in the extreme left of the campus, and reminded George of a large brown squatting cow in a lush meadow. The only wooden structure on the campus is the ancient Pittman Hall, in the center of it.

The venerable, mellowed and lightsome face of the old prof, and the

graven earnest visage of the young prof, the masters of men and campus, the arbiters and shapers of the destinies and hopes of the young people who come here to live and learn, or to learn how to live.

The Life the Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness, and the Hope, on the campus!

The campus. It comes into your life and never goes out of it. It is interwoven in you with its numberless tentacles, filaments and myriads of lineaments.

The campus: The beautiful campus. The hazy, motherly, warm, tender campus! The shining brilliant campus. The old campus, the young campus. The dowdy campus, the pert sprightly campus. The frowning, stern campus. The learned campus, the stupid campus. The bully campus. But the Mother Campus! The gentle campus of the wooded hinterland that leads down the slopes to the cool flowing, and leaping Kennebec.

It's the poetry, the philosophy of life. Its own life, on its own scale, on its own horizon, and on its own zenith!

And its zenith is reflected in the image of Prexy.

Prexy with brown face and fluttering cottails hovering over the Zenith, radiating lines of guidance to the campus populace.

Prexy, prexy, prexy!

The most often, the most mysterious spoken word on the campus.

Prexy - the new and the old, the unknown and the known - prexy!

Good old prexy!

Prexy and the campus!

The campus and prexy!

They gathered from all corners of the globe, teachers and pupils, crossed and recrossed and criss-crossed, grasped hands and became one. They were one and united in the body that was Bockly College. A round compact body, with the sunny smile of Prexy shining over all.

A tremendous wave of activity, an undulating body throwing its weight around. Every unit and part of it bustling, grabbing, grasping. Teacher and pupil preparing the ground, building the nest for the eventful year ahead. Teacher meets pupil. Teacher is painfully surprised or charmed. Pupil is somewhat disappointed. The professor in Greek, such a famous authority, a scholar, and all of him is like a skimpy bagful of bones! Ah, you dolt, you wanted a Van Dyke and a classic face, for the classic Greek! But whose stamp of approval on a classic face or anything classic that it be so and so to be classic? And what is classic and what isn't? Or what's so important in being classic, or a classic? Must it be of a certain age and stamp? For lo, and behold, the amiable professor of Zoology and Botany looks more like a farmer than a scientist. But he is entirely in his element - the soil, whence the related twins of botany and zoology, and its not far removed triplet biology. His face is ruddy from the sun that smiles on his soil, and though the fringe of hair around the smooth dome of his skull is greying, his face is round and full and youthful; for together with the sun and soil he has a youthful wife who satisfies his every other need. Things are not what they seem. And what they seem not they often are. You can go down the line and shrug your shoulders at all the sights unseen, and at all the wonders expected and unexpected, and come out at the other end changed or unchanged depending on your own peculiarities, and your mold, and your clay.

In the stony Geology building they are emptying the shelves, rearranging and arraying the peculiarly shaped and faced stones and rocks upon which rests the origin, the history and the destiny of our planet. The rocks are intangible and saturn, and immoveably moveable. They remain silent and cold as stone. And the supervisor of it all, the directing genius, who owns them and panders to them like his own children, has assumed and partaken of their unsmiling stoniness. But that's only his exterior, for underneath lies a smiling warm heart.

A thin youngish instructor, with a wry smile, directs the freshman physics. He teaches the physical phenomena of nature, and among his favorite subjects are the following: The new wonders, aerodynamics, and X-ray; and the old, but ever new wonder in the annals of Bocly's history - Jack Boomb's curve.

Jack Boombs, hallowed be thy name in the halls of Bocly! In 1912, as well as the years before (and the long years after) Boombs looms across the length and breadth of Bocly campus.

Once there was a great pitcher, born and brought up in the Bocly tradition. And he pitched for Bocly, and he became a "phenom" in the Majors, and his name was Jack Boombs. And once a year in the spring he would grace his Alma Mater with his august presence, and he would pitch a few innings and mow them down to the thrilling rhythmic heart-beat of the evangelical young alumni and alumnae, and ^{to content} the portly of the older and corpulent ones. However, if ever a batter, a young and uncouth whippersnapper, unschooled and untutored in the etiquette and method of respect for the withering arm of the greying old-timer, would smash the ball out of the playing-field and onto the rail outside the campus (and maybe hit an unwary speeding train) for a grand slam, those of excessive age and embonpoint would take as a huge joke - the prankster being old Boombs himself, and ~~was~~ his foil - the young fool who dared presume. They would shake their bellies in great guffaws, and pull on their fat cigars with great gusto. Aha, hah, hah, and ehe - he, he! "Isn't he the grand fellow though," one would poke the other's ribs. And the other jelly-belly would ululate with the merry note, "What a jolly goodfellow, Jack! He threw the dud to the young sprig so he'd have something to crow about, to tell his mother, perhaps his sweetheart, of his prodigious performance. He would tell his children, and they in turn their children to the end of the days. A grand benevolent act by a grand fellow." Upon that they would drink an extra bottle of the legal one-percent beer, and

their faces would burst with deceptive red color of new blood, presumptive young blood, that bloomed in them.

And now in the fall, when the curve was a fond memory, and to initiate the novitiates into the rites of Bocly's patron-saint of baseball, it became incumbent upon the young instructor to expatiate on the skill and deceptiveness of the Boombs curve, not only from a fond memory but also from the standpoint of physical laws as well. Since the instructor had nothing else to come to the aid of his verbal exposition of the curve but a linear line that suddenly splurges into a curve when it reaches the batter, and falls unscathed (the ball that is) into the catcher's mitt, it remained to George as mystifying and confusing as ever. Indeed, how could a ball thrown in a straight line suddenly start cavorting and drop on reaching the batter? Was it all an optical illusion, or was the professor right?

It was much easier to follow in the case of the wonder X-ray, where one could see the skeleton, or the shadows of bones of one's hand. Skeleton hands! How ephemeral the flesh was, that all that was permanent, if only for a while, was the skeleton! For that awesome exhibit the instructor had a wooden, box-like structure, narrow in front and wide in the rear, where you put your hand. You looked in - and horror upon horror, there they were, the long skeleton bones of your fingers! The moral of it!

Pittman Hall was almost at the exact center of the campus. It was an old nondescript wooden structure. Its only distinction was the huge bell on its roof that tolled the lugubrious hours for student and faculty alike. But in its ancient lecture rooms, patched over year after year with fresh varnish and paint that neither concealed decay nor the effluvium of mouldering wood, the mustiness of old books, there bubbled the wells of ancient tongues, Greek and Latin, and the freshets of the descendants of the latter - the Romance languages, French and German.

Dr. Hermann Konnard, nicknamed "Dutchy", presided over the German Department, while his antipode of the opposite side of the building, Professor Mormen, (French-American ancestry, good Baptist to the end of his days) headed the French Department. A little man, of unqualified quality, served as a liaison-officer of sorts between the two of them in his capacity as assistant instructor in French and German. George long remembered the man's pitiful honking trying to pronounce the word "donc" as it was pronounced by the good people of France. He was no more successful when he tried the guttural, first-person singular pronoun "Ich". The guttural gutted his vocal cords, got stuck there, and came out, to his disgust, "Ick". He was red-faced.

"Dutchy" on his part never failed to poke fun at his subordinate for his difficult labors anent the controversial "ch". Pouting and tightening a thin lip, "All dat's needed is a slight constriction of the (pronounced "dche") larynx, dhus," and he proceeded to hawk violently. But that was only the start, the impetus, from which his impish good-natured drollery would take its cue to launch on a long tirade in his quaint English, which came guttural and hard in Germanic accents, to the acute delight of his students. Often he would point a gnarled finger at a student, male or female, who was caught dreaming of something more pleasant than the German neuter. But it was only a Puckish finger, bent on a bit of mischief, and a scolding sting that had no venom in it.

It was always good Old Dutchy.

The art and curiosity of being a college freshman. You need the divi-
 ning imagination of an artist, the double-edged sword of the ^{angel-}guardian of
 Eden, the courage of a Hercules, and the swiftness of feet of an Apello, to
 keep your feet on the campus, and keep your head above water. Actually, you
 could be made to walk upside down (on your hands, and mowed down if you are
 qualmish; or thrown into the Kennebec or Maselensky, your head doused in
 the wintry waters), to crawl on your belly, mew like a weak kitten, or growl
 like a bulldog, or sprint like a monkey. And you can be made to do all these
 things and more if you are obstreperous and show it; or if you are of the
 arrogant type and don't show it, that is not having the guts to back it up;
 or if in general you are stupid and are inclined to be supercilious. Espe-
 cially the last two ~~things~~ are the privilege of the upper classmen. For they
 have the wisdom, the right, and the tradition, and you are but the worm that
 crawls in mushy soil and can only look up. Rah, rah, and another rah to the
 Upper Classman, and don't forget to look up to him! Not down, for you are
 a lowly worm, crawling on the ground.

You must never wear a sweater on the campus grounds, that privilege is
 reserved only for the higher classes. You must not talk to a coed, you must
 not walk on the right side of the street. You must be stigmatized and signa-
 lized by wearing the multi-colored Freshman cap which announces your being,
 like a beacon light, from any distance. You must eat and drink and sleep and
 perform your other natural functions according to mandate and prescription
 from your natural overlords.

George bowed to all the rules and regulations not out ^{of} mere meekness and
 submissiveness (there was a stubborn streak in his makeup) but because he
 he wanted to. He found life on the campus ^{on} companionable and curious. And he
 actually took pleasure in his "tormentors". It was a game and he meant to
 play it cheerfully and gracefully with the rest of his class. He conceived of
 the college campus ^{as something} to be appreciated as no other spot on earth, as an entity

in its own orbit, with its own stellar system. It's a taing, it's a being, it's a colossus; it's a ferocious thing, it's a friend. It's good, it's bad, it's frowning, it's smiling; it hates, it loves. It's dark, it's light! It has all the angles and the facets. And you take them ~~at~~ according to your own appreciation, attribute, and attitude. But take them you must. One moment you are a hero, you strut ~~with~~ your ego, for you are one of that great body that comprises this little compact universe with its own medicum of laws and regulations. In another moment you are the lowly Freshman with the stigma of the fresman cap, and the bowing and scraping to the sophomore, who has you in his immediate clutch. But you derive a sort of vicarious pleasure ~~from~~ from the pricks and needles from your immediate superior, the Sophomore, who is ~~in~~ in charge of you for the rest of them, especially the Seniors, who had become senile and slothful with age. It's not a martyrdom, nor the good-neighbor policy, nor turning the other cheek; but sort of a communal feeling, of being in the midst of things no matter what they are. Not to be conspicuous.

Some rebel, and become conspicuous, because they are intolerant. And so is intolerance ~~even~~ greater evoked against them. And the regulations more stringent, and even vengeful. The rebel becomes an outcast, and wee to him on the traditional hazing night, Bloody Monday Night, if he is anywhere to be found, on or off the campus.

Chapter III

Bloody Monday Night

The pomp and circumstance, the chastisement, the ennoblement, the pride, the compulsion, the motivated and the blind spirit, ~~the~~, the dominating eruptive force, the submissiveness, the ennui and the clash of passions