Remarks on the Harvard triennial.

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DABNEY (J.P.)

with nespects

REMARKS

ON THE

HARVARD TRIENNIAL.

Jonathan Peele Dabney, Class of 1811.



ADVERTISEMENT

The following remarks were originally intended for the Boston Advertiser, and adopted therefore the current style of a review, which it is now little worth the pains to alter. But the junior editor saw fit to reject them; and could not find it in his heart, to drop the hostility there. He had been timely sounded on the subject of the article, by one of his own circle of friends, who hinted its character and aim; the reply conveyed nothing like objection. When the piece was, in part, seen by him, it was declined on account of its nature simply; though of what nature it was, he was just as well aware, two days before. The MS. was conveyed to the office, through the same friend, with the distinct request, that, if it did not find favour, it should be, through this channel, returned in season for another disposal against a particular day. To recover it, however, cost not a little trouble and delay; which were only ended by the writer's being enforced, at his own cost, to give it its present form.

In lieu of acceptance, it was assailed in the B. D. A. with petty and feeble cavil; a paragraph, which was transferred in a heedless moment to the Transcript, as its publishers now seem to admit. The editor could not be content to shut it out from his own journal, without doing his best, in dramatic phrase, to 'damn' it in advance for every other. It was a course alike ungentlemanly, ungenerous, and unkind. If he was not called upon to render his reasons for the step to me, there was surely as little call to give them to the public. It was not worth while for one, who occupied a chair in which he felt himself at liberty to be despotic, to give them at all. They could afford to be frivolous. As to an article strictly anonymous—coming through the post-office,—the writer of which could no otherwise be reached or noti-

[See last leaf of this cover.]

REMARKS

ON THE

HARVARD TRIENNIAL.

This dry and unsavory document does not offer to the eye of the million, a very tempting caption. It will look odd somewhat to place in an attitude for review, a collection of names and dates; or to hope for attention to petty statistics. We fancy, however, that not a few kindred tastes will be arrested the rather by this very title; and already suspicious of the truth, be apt to say that the strictures we have in view, do not come a day too soon. The return of our annual holiday renews that interest, and makes it an opportune time. The Triennial seems to have been hitherto a privileged periodical; either above or below criticism, as individual humours determine. This immunity from the common ordeal has certainly been any thing but an advantage to the book; and nothing else could have emboldened some whom we have known, to lay upon it quite too hasty hands, as revisers. Happy for our Catalogue would it have been years since, if those taking it in charge, had had before their eyes the same salutary fear that operates upon other editors and authors. We mean to use no unmeasured words, and yet can hardly hope, the patience of the reader will attend us into the fullest detail, in order to make them good. We would otherwise pledge ourselves to show that, from a collegiate source, no reports (if that term be fitting,) of this nature, ever issued from time to time, less worthy of reliance. We doubt truly,-to sport with our subject,-whether a much stronger case can be made out against their own, by the brother-reformers who have given, the present season, such prominence and interest to a great philanthropic society of the age.

These charges of negligence lie pre-eminently at the door of almost every Catalogue from 1830 onward; it is not worth our while at least to go further back. It would startle many readers perhaps, to tell how many persons during that interval were consigned by the revisers (after their best ability,) to premature graves; and how many, on the other hand, were left on the stage unthought of, uncounted years after the curtain had been drawn between them and the living world. In that of 1842, divers graduates,-through our own humble agency, in every case but one, we think,-were restored to their happy friends, all of whom had slept, on our academic roll at least, very much more than a Rip Van Winkle sleep. And yet one of these, poor man !- we grieve to see it, -is, in the latest Triennial, remanded back to his own place; no doubt, viewed as becoming, by his resuscitation, a fugitive from justice. Inexorable death has become but the obedient instrument of the Catalogue editors. For the benefit of any of our readers who may be curious, we refer them for this last case to the Class of 1785. But as if to "to keep the balance even," in this self-same catalogue of 1842, in lieu of the restored (spoken of above) more living names were expunged, without asking leave of them or of Providence, than can probably be found in any one catalogue from their earliest date. It will give your readers some idea how busy was the destroyer in that day, to mention that two of these unfortunates stand in juxtaposition in the same class (1784). To all, thus involved, one comfort, at least, we trust was left;-that their eyes and nerves were not called to the trial of seeing their own death-sign. We may not be too sure of that: this we can say, the editor was saved the trouble as to both these Siamese dead, of repairing his blunder. The first opportunity came too late. What hastened their end, we shall not too curiously inquire. There does, however, recur to memory a case, not above eight years since, to which our own ears can testify. Being in the college book-store upon Commencement morning, we were aroused by the outbreak of a gentleman, who, having entered and called for his Catalogue, then just issued, at once exclaimed in a tone of horror, "Why, I'm dead!" Is it, we would just query, an

instinctive foreboding, that now-a-days, prompts a graduate, with every new Triennial, to turn, first of all things, to his own name?

A good illustration of the whole matter in hand rises before us, which it may be just as well to give in detail, from a single class, (1811). In 1839 a worthy gentleman, far down in the alphabet, then and now a resident in the secluded island of St. Croix, W. I. was suddenly asterized. We happened to know beforehand the evidence upon which this had been probably done; but being lighter than a feather in itself, we did not anticipate it was to lead to so egregious a step. A gentleman of fortune of this city (whose name will occur to many minds) the owner and nearly annual visiter of landed estates in the island just named, returned home that very autumn, and two months after it was too late, the error was disproved to general conviction. For ourselves, no conviction was wanted. It waited for rectification, of course, nearly three years. And then, (1842)-asterisks being too precious to be lost,-that in question, taken off from the end of the class, was thrown, at a sort of venture, to the beginning, where it alighted on the luckless head of another gentleman almost as remote,-not in "the far west," as it now is,-but in Dayton, Ohie. And what warrant was there for this? Why, that in some one of our city papers, under the obituary of past years, this family name, with a different christian one had been found! This second blunder was virtually confessed in the catalogue of 1845; so that the asterisk has begun its travels again. Truly, with a few such examples before us, we cannot quite refrain from a gentle hint at least, that the office of an editor of the Triennial is not altogether the humble service some doubtless think it. An acquaintance with petty facts is not alone to be supposed; but some little aptness surely to use them for comparison and inference. Let us, while this quality of judgment is up, be allowed to produce an example in relation to quite another point, and breathe awhile from this sad subject of mortality. In the Catalogue of 1845, as many have noticed, his Oxford honor is withheld from the distinguished head of our University. A specimen of wise decision this, indeed! the reasons of which one might vainly exercise his fancy in guessing. That it was bestowed amid some disorder, and after some feeble opposition, every one knows; but who before ever doubted his legitimate title to wear it?

In what we were constrained to say of the Catalogues from 1830 inclusive, no disrespect certainly was implied to the gentleman and scholar to whose care, we believe, the four first of these were subjected. The extraordinary and unheard-of method pursued with the catalogue from that date,-but never previously,this lies at the very bottom of our strictures. It was committed into whatever hands most conveniently offered, connection with college, in some way or other, being the great qualification. The Corrector of the University Press however (as was then that gentleman) had no sympathy, officially, with researches like these; he did not pretend to have, individually. This service was not coveted, but rather enforced upon him; and his proper vocation filled his hands. But there existed, sad to say, in the highest quarter, no right apprehension of a subject, which was intimately united with antiquarian pursuits; and as little respect probably either for such pursuits or for those addicted to them. It was not a thing to be conceived of, that the care of the Triennial required any special or peculiar qualities; though, if not, it is pretty nearly an exception among books. One man, it was doubtless thought, was about as good as another to fit this work against Commencement-day; just as one operative would serve equally well with an hundred others, to trim the borders and run the roller over the gravel-walks, for the same occasion. The essential thing about the pamphlet was, that CATALOGUS HARVARDIA-NUS should be correctly labelled on its side; the character of its contents was quite another affair. Like Milton's first woman, "of outward show elaborate; of inward, less exact." The whited sepulchre of olden time, fair to view, covered dead men's bones and all uncleanness. The Catalogue, with its neat pea-green outside, is certainly little else than a death-register; and if "uncleanness" may typify error in its grossest forms, the comparison will not be wholly without resemblance.

The appending the date of death—or what was to pass for that,-to the several names, made quite an era in the monotonous history of the Catalogue. It seemed at the time to find a general welcome, as an essential improvement. The design was confessedly praiseworthy. As to the rest, every thing turned upon its being a severely faithful array of dates ;-not a wanton collection of figures, scattered, as it were, after the leading of the dicebox. The satisfaction with this feature, expressed, supposed at the outset that it was a reliable reference. And yet,-putting aside scarcely a half-dozen exceptions, -this is to be taken for granted, if taken at all. Each individual can speak little further than to some few connections or classmates of his own. More than five years since at the very least, we were ourselves questioned by the late Judge Story, the suggester and main promoter of the new feature, as to its feasibleness. The exact reply given him we cannot recall. What in substance it should have been, has been a settled 'part and parcel' of our mind, long ago; earlier even than the appearance of the recent Triennial; -of course, now confirmed ten-fold. This is, that, under any circumstances, it called for and claimed very cautious and gradual preparation; nor even then was it likely to find fitting execution, except from hands already familiar with the infinite minutiæ which that involved. A few weeks of hasty, rather of headlong, attention; without any true responsibility to command respect and confidence; devolved upon any doer of all work upon the college premises, -such a course could only serve to make it a laughing-stock in the eyes of other colleges and of our own sons. An eminent alumnus of Harvard (no name certainly more than his is upon the tongues of men) expressed to us last April the opinion, self-prompted we can faithfully affirm, that what to him was most observable and striking was-the anxicus endeavour to make a formidable show of dates. How often the like judgment has or has not been expressed, it is not easy to say; but we should be glad to know of a man who entertains any other. Alas! for that precipitancy. " Vaulting ambition," &c. ... we know the rest.

We intend no proper dissection of the catalogue here. Space indeed would utterly fail us. We must pass over untouched the multitudinous cases, that are wide from truth not more than from one to five years; in fact, the nature of the topic deters us from entering minutely into any, short of from a score to a half-century of years astray. Within stinted limits, as we are, we can do but poor justice to these. There is indeed a class of examples, whose unhappiness is not so much in any interval of years from truth, as in the ludicrous confusion of persons plainly made. Such a medley of fathers mistaken for sons, and sons for fathers, of uncles and nephews transposed, of two identical names shot down with the same date which belonged only to one, (to "kill two birds" of this sort "with a stone" will not do), and of persons never perchance within college walls, favoured with a sort of ad eundem on its roll,-is it possible elsewhere to find? As to this blind-man's buff, this groping uncertainly among namesakes and relatives, there rushes at once to mind, by natural association, the pleasant story which is related somewhere by Scott ;-in allusion, very likely, to the long current imputation of his own novels to his brother Thomas in Canada. Sorry we are to mar, as we may, his graphic sketch by being driven to quote from memory. He tells of a sheriff's officer (probably enough, of the Emerald isle) entrusted with an execution, who, failing of his prey, made report on his return,- 'We could n't find the fellow, we looked for, your honour; but, that nothing may be lost, we laid hold of his brother, you see; and that, we suppose, will do just as well.' Such seems to be the very accommodating principle of the college catalogue ; -- any possessor of the name will serve to fill the blank, if the true man answer not to our call. Doubtless its remaining blanks will rapidly disappear.

In the Preface to the late Triennial, if we mistake not, readers are notified, in relation to this new enterprize, not to receive 'with implicit credence' [!] all the dates annexed, as a few slight errors were but the lot of humanity. Many an amateur of the catalogue has doubtless smiled 'in his sleeve' or out of it, at this considerate

warning; and wondered how large was the simplicity that stood in need of it. It may be said, in passing, that the Preface referred to, is no circular from the Corporation, though evidently intended to pass for such, and, to our knowledge, thus mistaken by numbers. It is nothing but an individual's call.

While these strictures are in progress, a fresh Triennial will be seen from Yale, in which the idea, suggested from Harvard, is carried out. But we well know it has been deliberately done; under auspices like those of Professor Kingsley and Mr. 'Librarian' Herrick; and we doubt not a moment, worthily in all points of that ancient academic seat. By its side, the document of her sister college will present but a sorry comparison. Whatever rivalry there may be on a greater scale, of which their respective sons and friends sometimes speak, there will be none here.

We now take leave of the Harvard Catalogue; only subjoining a few of the more notable examples to which we have adver-Minor blemishes must be dismissed with little ceremony. One or more specimens may perhaps be gathered from every column. To every reader, the illustrations here seen, will prove, we doubt not, an abundant guaranty of "greater abominations"* which might be shown. The aggregate of error in the unexhibited cases, we will venture 'a guess,' without making any computation, amounts to some hundreds of years. A late College Treasurer, (we learn it from a sure source) thought the Catalogue a heavy item of charge, recurring needlessly often. Well might he so deem, if it could produce only results like these. In the autumn of 1845, an injunction suspended for many weeks the delivery of the catalogue; to the exceeding inconvenience and great ill-humour of numbers of graduates. And all for what? That a half-line of fancied omission in his titles might be supplied, at his clamorous call, to the name of a public man, of somewhat large, but not too happy, notoriety. Did the honourable Corporation think that these were the gravest errors that called for their interference? If some modest and deeply secluded country minister, whose fresh clerical honour [S.T.D.] had by some accident been forgotten; and to whom, in the eyes of brethren around and parishioners at home, this honour was his all in all,—had he made the like lament, would it have found the same alert and even eager respect as that paid to a venal politician?—But we digress. If any heed were likely to be paid to advice from us in regard to the Catalogue of the ensuing year, it would be summed in a word—Reverse the engine. Let all the labour be retrograde. To talk of further progress is best left for a coming age. The Triennial, which now receives some fair share of interest and attention, will otherwise, instead of embalming the dead, become itself the veriest dead-letter, untouched and uncared for; and to no individual enrolled on its page, may the common wish be more pertinently spoken, than to itself—Requiescat in pace.

Prefixed to each name is the date of collegiate standing; and suffixed, the alleged date of death. It hardly seemed worth while to specify the precise day of decease in the cases below, though for the most part known to us. The authorities we have specified, in the italic character.

- 1772. Benjamin Loring.* 1781. Commodore L. the father, was a retired naval officer, and commissioner of excise, whose residence was at Jamaica Plain, (the seat of the late D. S. Greenough), and who became a refugee. He died at Highgate, near London, in the autumn of 1781. But the son,—except that he also crossed the water,—of him we challenge the revisers to show any knowledge.
- 1762. Joseph Hooper.* 1790. An exact counterpart. Joseph was the second son of "Old King Robert"—his well-known title in Marblehead, where he died (the King, observe,) in May, 1790, aged eighty. Him, it seems, the revisers mistook for a graduate less than thirty years previous. Not exactly: J. H., who left his country for England even before the Revolution, died in Bungay, Norfolk, more than twenty years after his assigned date.—Private Letter from his descendants on Long Island.
- 1748. Edward Hutchinson.* 1752. This completes a triplet of examples. The Hon. E. H., the namesake and father, preceded Gov. H. his kinsman, as Judge of Probate for Suffolk. He it was who died in 1752. But this son, who sunk into

mental feebleness, and dependence on his friends, died at Oxford in Worcester co. within the present century, towards 1810.—Private L. from W. Sigourney, Oxford.

- 1772. Jonathan Simpson.* 1804. The Catalogue has "cut short his days" somewhat over thirty years. J. S. was a son-inlaw of John Borland, esq. (a well-known gentleman of fortune, of the Revolutionary period,) and died in this city so lately that many will, doubtless, remember him [see newspapers.] This blunder, as was apparent to us in a moment, grew out of servilely copying a mere typographical error of our own.
- 1770. Owen Warland.* 1795. An overshooting the mark of twenty years. O. W. was of Cambridge, and died of the small-pox on the very threshold of life as a medical practitioner, within five years from college.—See newspapers.
- 1771. Edward Kitchen Turner.* 1771. That is, he died on the very year he left college. So much for relying on the treacherous authority of Winthrop's MS. Unluckily E.K.T. went through a whole three years' medical course as a student with Dr. Holyoke [Mem. of Dr. H.]; and then, after a voyage or two between Salem, his native place, and the North of Europe, was lost on his return from Gottingen .- the world Private Information from a living contemporary.

1771. Amos Winship.* 1811. What is the warrant for this? The individual, early in life an apothecary at the North end, [Boston,] afterwards a surgeon in the U.S. navy, and in his last years a victim of mental dejection or alienation, died at Welfleet on Cape Cod, somewhat prior to 1828 .- Private L. from the Town Cl. of W.

1768. Jeremiah Fogg.* 1828. His father, of the same name, [H. C. 1730] was minister at Kensington, N. H.; and there also lived and died, the son; not in 1828, however, but twenty years earlier.—See newspapers.

1746. Benjamin Fessenden.* 1762. He too had a clerical father of the same name [H.C. 1718], minister of Sandwich: Here also the son, who was an innkeeper, died some twenty years later than the date given him .- Private information and newspapers. [The above vocation was maintained in S. through the next generation under the same name, with an unusual celebrity.]

1755. Philip Livingston.* 1776. On the contrary, this young gentleman died at the Livingston Manor, N. Y. almost from col-

- lege walls; that is, in the succeeding spring. There is no dispute about this. His brother, Peter L.—class of 1757—died according to the Catalogue, in 1798. Upon what authority, we are quite at a loss to discover.
- 1773. Theodore Parsons.* 1779. This was the youngest brother of the late Judge P., and whose life began with high promise. He entered, the War being still in progress, as a surgeon on board an armed ship (the Bennington); and the vessel was soon after hemmed in amid the ice of the river St. Lawrence, when all on board perished in a lamentable manner. Mr. P. as a young man of scientific spirit, became one of the founders of the American Academy, where his name is seen in the original Act. As this, however, bears date in 1780, it really casts some faint doubt upon the idea of his having died a year before.
- 1770. Abner Smith.* 1843. A native of Springfield; minister of Derby, Ct. 'Great hill' parish, until 1824; he then removed to Reading in that vicinity; and in a few years to the western part of New-York state, where he died at a great age, 1837-41. Nothing definite can be learned of him. Any one of some six or eight years, might stand there with equal propriety.
- 1741. Robert Cutler.* 1765. A native of West Cambridge, minister of Epping, N.H. [1747-1755], and of Greenwich, Hampshire co. [from 1760]; dismissed, we believe, for some alleged immorality, he died more than twenty years after the date assigned. Am. Qu. Reg.
- 1733. Christopher Bridge.* 1773. We pronounce this utterly baseless. C. B. who was the son of an espiscopal missionary at Jamaica, W.I. (his own location the revisers will hardly venture to name) died at least twenty-five years prior to the above date. See the Triennial Cat. of 1748.
- 1726. Joseph Pynchon.* 1754. Again betrayed by confiding in Winthrop. J. P. a physician of Springfield, and J. of P. of Hampshire co. removed eventually to Boston, and outlived nearly a dozen years his above-given period of life. Suffolk Prob. Rec. & Colonial newspaper.
- 1725. Thomas Diamond.* 1728. A native of Ipswich, "who died before the Commencement of 1728," says Winthrop. But did he imply how much before? He is already asterized in the Cat. of 1727.
- 1730. John Barton.* 1734. An error of forty years, and entrap-

- ed therein a second time by a mere typographical error in our lucubrations. The person was a merchant of Salem, his native place, to the very eve of the Revolution.
- 1722. John Mountfort.* 1785. This juxta blunder is the counterpart of the former in extent (forty years); but what could have misled this time, no conjectural skill of ours is deep enough to say. The person was of Boston, son of John and Mary M. City Rec.
- 1687. Josiah Dwight.* 1726. The date not of his death exactly, but only of the close of his first ministry. He was son of Timothy D. of Dedham; first minister of Woodstock, Ct. [1690-1726], and the same of Dedham, west parish, [1735-'42]. He returned to W. and died about seven or eight years after. (Boston News-letter.) An error of perhaps twenty-two years.
- 1650. John Whiting.* 1709. J. W. was the first minister of the south ch. of Hartford, Ct.; and died a full twenty years prior to the above. (Hartford Prob. Rec.) So writes a friend and critically exact antiquary, familiar with the archives of every town and county along the shore of the Connecticut.
- 1762. Isaac Winslow.* 1819. The revisers, it is plain, thought this to be Dr. Jsaac W. of Marshfield, long a well-known physician on the South-shore, and youngest son of Gen. John W. But they were entirely at fault. The true Isaac, a merchant of Boston, of the Sandemanian faith, and politically a loyalist, died in B. very near thirty years earlier. (Pr.L. from the family.) This too, we can see, is to be traced to the following too close (without seeking further) in the track of a published and early error of our own.
- 1727. Isaac Winslow.* 1738. The father of the above. He died under British protection at New-York, just about the middle of the revolutionary war. (See certain newspapers.) This faux-pas is very nearly or quite of the forty years' stamp. Whence that 1738 was derived, we are entirely puzzled to divine.
- 1705. John Wilson.* 1772. This is the strongest case, numerically (i. e. counting time) in our whole series. We marvel whom the revisers thought they had got here. Had his life been prolonged as the above implies, he would have been, with scarcely an exception, the oldest living graduate. But the simple fact is,—J. W., a native of Braintree, settled at or preaching in Swanzey, Bristol co. was carried off by a rapid fever, when less than ten years out of college.—Letter of Hon. Judge Sewall, contemporary with the event.

1669. Joseph Gerrish.* 1720.) Did then these persons (father and 1700. Joseph Gerrish.* 1720. (son) both die, -- do the revisers seriously think, -on the self-same year? Singular truly; though there is no natural impossibility. The father, the minister of Wenham, near Salem, and very well known in his day by his brethren of Essex, finished his course, to be sure, at the time above given, as confirmed by many testimonies. The son too is designated as a minister. But of his sepulchre "no man knoweth," and quite as little on what part of the earth's surface was his path of life that ended there. All is obscurity; which not even John Farmer has been able to penetrate. How then is this? Why, some grave [Qu. comic?] authorities seem quite at a loss to settle which is the father; or again, it is said, that both, (despite of records) were ministers of W., the one being a fac-simile life to the other from its first hour to its last. And some old gentlemen, much deferred to in these matters, giving in, as we are told, for one (or perhaps, uniting both) of these theories, the result follows. We are half ashamed so to state it; but no better apology is there for this double date.

1709. John Wainwright.* 1739. We repeat the challenge with 1711. John Wainwright.* 1739. which the preceding article began. John Wainwright of Ipswich, colonel of the regiment, a representative, Clerk of the House,—evidently a considerable man,—died Sep. 1739. [B.News-let.] But which of these near contemporaries, if either, was he? It is not very likely, both; though it was very long doubtful to those most at home in these inquiries, which. But it is not doubtful now; nor was it previous to the issuing of the last Triennial. From evidence in the College Library, then recent, it was clear that in 1739, the later John [1711] had been dead at least a dozen years. We know him to have been so [drowned] very near twenty years before. (Town Records in Essex co.) To both this date and the preceding one then, what better name can we apply than dishonesty?

fied that his offering was unwelcome,—in such case perhaps, no other course remained than the one taken. But, when the desk could so easily be rid of what it does not want, as in the instance before us, what apology shall be made? There were eyes, whether he knew it or not, that would sparkle with malignant joy to read what he had written.

It is on all sides an admitted rule, that every book is amenable to criticism; it is an obvious corollary, that the way should be left open for it. Yet a pamphlet, such as was the subject of my remarks, plainly can be brought to no other bar than that of the daily press. It does not comport at all with more stately and professed Reviews. And yet here is one of the fraternity, exerting every nerve to block up the avenues to the judgment-seat; with an earnestness, that may well arouse curiosity to pry into his hidden and probable motives. On the very threshold of that ill-starred article it was said, that it had been the chief misfortune of the Harvard Triennial, to have escaped all criticism in past time. The editor gave or tried to give (what was not asked) his reasons for refusing such criticism. Intangible as they were, they seemed, in the best form and shape that could be given them, to be some vague and shadowy fancy that family affinities rendered any thing, having an unfriendly bearing upon the college, peculiarly unfit for his columns. To this point it may suffice to reply, - what few readers of average understanding will need should be told them - that the present distinguished Head of the University, to whom is gladly tendered our share of the general respect and admiration, is about as much implicated in any of its strictures as if he continued to the present moment to adorn a foreign court. They most literally all pertain to a preceding period. No catalogue has been issued under his name and auspices. Whenever that time comes, we live in the hope that a better æra will begin.

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