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Οδι πώ σφυν ἵξειρηον αἶρα σαιμόνων.

It is a most true observation, that “Institutions come to nothing when they abandon the principles which they embody;” and we cannot but think of this with some anxiety, when we consider the nature of the various changes which have of late years, from within as well as from without, been suggested with respect to our present University and College system; almost all of them advocating the taking up of new ground, rather than the recovery, so far as is practicable, of that which
we once occupied. To those who are in the habit of undervaluing or disregarding all such forces as are not reducible to statistical calculation, much of what I shall here say of those time-consecrated influences and associations, with which our ancient Collegiate Institutions are by their very antiquity so richly endowed, will probably appear visionary and fanciful. Let such, however, remember that there are those who believe that it is through the feelings more than the understanding that the Inner Man is to be reached and the soul awoke; that the Imagination is as Divine a part of man as his Reason, and is that which is to be especially cultivated in youth; since, as one deeply says, “Thought without Reverence is barren, perhaps poisonous?” “Wouldst thou plant for Eternity, then plant into the deep infinite faculties of man, his Fantasy and Heart; wouldst thou plant for Year and Day, then plant into his shallow superficial faculties, his Self-love and Arithmetical Understand-
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At all events I shall speak here of influences, the effects of which I have felt myself, and traced in those around me; and my object in these letters will be not to suggest changes, even such as I might think desirable, for I write mainly to under-graduates, but to take the Collegiate system as it is, and attempt to show how it still exhibits opportunities for carrying out most advantageously the principles of our statutes. I shall try to give the student some insight into the character and origin of these Foundations, such as may help him to enter into the spirit of these Institutions and of the Place, by bringing out, wherever it is still discernible, the traces of their original rise out of the Monasteries and Monastic schools: the spirit for founding them taking its rise as that for founding Monasteries declined.

I know few greater aids and assistances to

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1 Surtor Resartus, p. 233.
the religious principles of a young student than such associations, fostering as they do a spirit of Reverence, and converting unmeaning laws and ceremonials into venerable symbols of living Truths. The remembrance of the great and good, who have trodden before him the path he is here called to walk, will animate and invigorate him, and that prayer uttered by one of old will often arise from him with reference to them, “O Domine, da ut non degenerem ab excelsis cogitationibus filiorum Dei!”

The temptations indeed and dangers of College have, I am persuaded, been much exaggerated. I doubt whether there is any other course of life which presents to the young beginner so few temptations to ill, and in which the path to be pursued lies so straight before him, and the inducements to right doing are so strong.

Martyrs to study are very rare. Many more injure their health by neglect of study,
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than by excess of it. Many parents, sending a son to College who has delicate health, direct him not to try to read for Honours. This is a great mistake. In the present state of the system of our Universities, where the examination for Honours stands almost in the place which that for Degrees used to occupy, such a one finds himself excluded from the main interests of the place, and with very little provision made for him.

I shall not make any apology for having omitted in these letters those “pro forma” sentences, which usually denote their opening and conclusion. The epistolary form seemed most suitable to my purpose, and for that reason solely I adopted it; and though the letters are written as addressed to an undergraduate, I hope they may not be found void of some thoughts which may be useful even to those of older standing.