HIS SECOND SENIOR CLASS DAY—By Grace Ellery Channing

In those days people sat on their doorsteps.

As the train drew near the city Mr. Devine actually laid aside his paper unfinished and from a casual observation of some passing landmark gave his whole attention to the moving scene outside the car window.

"There are the falls," he commented to himself. "H-m, that used to be the last station but one, and the old crossing—but they've filled up the pond. Must be getting pretty near."

He glanced at his watch and fell to thinking with characteristic energy what he should say to his son—which, equally characteristically, he had avoided doing until now. He never wasted more time upon any business transaction than was necessary for its successful handling, and Howard and Howard's affairs, including whatever foolishness he might now have got into his head, were merely his next most pressing piece of business—certainly the business nearest his heart, but which he could have done nothing to advance by fussing over all the way between Chicago and X——.

He had in fact done no fussing at all since he had read his son's letter, but he had not been unaware of a slight, subconscious anxiety, like an undercurrent, through all his business hurry since. And he had had to hurry, beyond the usual quick despatch of business, to enable him to snatch this rare holiday for even such an important event as his son's senior class day and commencement.

It was a day they had looked forward to for years—ever since he had entered the boy (a little reluctant, for were not Harvard and Yale more sounding names?) at his own university, using—he had never told Howard how much—of his gilded substance to secure the very same old dormitory which he had occupied in his student years. On that point of the university he had shown a singular obstinacy.

"Yale or Harvard after, for any special course you like," he had said, "and Europe after that; I don't propose to stint you in anything, but I've set my heart on my only son taking his degree where his father and his grandfather did before him. It's a good university—and our native town. The accident of your being born and brought up out West" (like all middle Westerners, he spoke of Chicago as "West) "alters nothing. A little pure New England won't hurt you and you'll get it double distilled in X——. It hasn't changed any."

Here the speaker had smiled a trifle grimly, for if he loved the place with an ancestral weakness he also privately despised it as a "back number." His son—also privately—thought this might be other than a recommendation, but he yielded with a good grace. What are a few years to youth, with its certain hold upon immortality?

"It's a wonder to me you never go back for class reunions," he once remarked during a vacation as they sat talking college in the library over their cigars; and his father had answered with a shrug:

"Oh, either there's a flurry on the market or a big case on hand, or your mother is wanting to sail for Europe just then. We'll come to your class day," he had added, and they had both laughed.

He was keeping the promise now, though alone, and thought with a moment's grave regret of his wife—how much the day would have meant to her. He could not have failed to come if only on her account, and he would not willingly have done so on his own; but Howard had triple clinched the certainty with that last letter of his—a very bombshell of a letter to wind up a four years course in which the boy had run up no debts, got into no scrapes, and done, on the whole, very decently in his classes. The work had always been the very least consideration in Mr. Devine's eyes, New Englander though he was; he had seen too much of the world to think much of a college preparation for it; what he had valued for his son were the "associations."

And now he was suddenly and coolly informed that his son had enough of college—that he did not want to go to Europe, but was bent, instead, on going straight into one of the big paternal machine shops after a brief holiday (presumably to recruit from the exhaustion of scholarships), and he had presented at least six good reasons for taking this holiday, of all the places in the world, at Ogunquitt. Having sent his son back to a New England nurture, this should have been to Mr. Devine grateful evidence of his accurate intuitions; instead of which he had frowned heavily on reading the ingenuous presentation and boiled the six reasons briefly down into one, which he as briefly enunciated—"Girl!"—as he put the letter in his pocket and promptly dismissed the matter (save for the subconsciousness) to be dealt with on the ground when face to face with his son.

That this meeting was now imminent another glance out of the car window assured him. He had not yet decided what to say, but—well, he was not going to have the boy's future spoiled by one of the girls he remembered only too well, and who, doubtless, had continued her line of succession—the very kind of a girl to play havoc with an inexperienced Western youth. A mass of white marble here hurled arrogantly by the window.

"Must be the new court house—quite a structure—and just where we used to go chestnutting," muttered the traveller, then leaned eagerly forward. "By Jove!—there's the old hill!—and the old church spire——!"

A curious look came into the eyes trained to impassiveness. He stood up, like all the passengers, from sheer force of habit, and began to worry down the suit case from the rack, after the manner of all uneasy Americans, never waiting to arrive before arriving. But that done, he continued, standing, to gaze with an eager intentness at the piled up banks, crowned with trees and houses, through which the train hurled, under a street bridge, around a curve, and finally into a long and dim station, and it was not primarily the meeting with his son which caused his firm hand to tremble slightly as it grasped the boy's a moment later outside. Not lightly may a man step backward thirty years. The first glance he gave at his son assured him of one thing, however; it was "the boy" no longer; the second thrilled him with instinctive pride and pleasure in the tall, sturdy young fellow beside him.

"Not much wrong there," he thought with anxious reassurance, precisely because the chap looked suspiciously, exuberantly well.

With an almost suspicious energy too, Howard had seized upon his father and his father's belongings and was piloting both toward a cab when his father stopped him.

"If you don't mind, Howard, I'd like to walk—get unstiffened and my bearings at the same time."

His son looked astonished. In his acquaintance with him his father never had time to walk, an automobile run to the speed limit and, when discreetly practicable, over, was his pace.

"Why, of course," he said. "It's only ten minutes; you'll find it's the same old town still," he added patronizingly.

Receiving no reply he glanced at his companion, and it was vaguely brought home to him that he was on the eve of surprises; there was an expression on his father's face new to him as he glanced about the square with its impossible monument.

"Same old spot we used to hold our Memorial Day orations," he murmured. "And look here, Howard! I was in the mob of torchlighters when Blaine came out on that old City Hall pedestal and addressed us. By George! I can see it all now."

The young man watched with the indulgent amusement of youth the changes in his father's face, and it changed many times during the walk.

"The dear old boy must have cared a lot," he thought with sympathy; and was quite unaware that a year ago he would not have been sympathetic at all.

He supposed now that their mutual fondness came back to ancestral feelings; after all, this was what they had really come out of, and that always counted; he knew such a lot of people out West who had never come out of anything. Still, he was used to seeing his father—a contained, rather caustic man, with a keen brain for business which still had kept its intellectual edge—moved by quite other than ancestral matters, if at all. Moreover, he had his own reasons for watching the pater very closely just now.

Seen so, the two were curiously like, yet unlike enough to mark one of those American transitions due to geographical influences. At 50 the father was still young, a fact which his gray hairs only handsomely emphasized, and the New England lines were rather rounded out than obliterated by Western contacts.

The son suggested a youth who had come to manhood under larger—it might be also easier—conditions; he was taller, ampler and more richly colored, with a wider, less intense gaze. One guessed that much had come to him as birthright which the elder had achieved.

All the way to the hotel the elder man continued quietly to note inconspicuous landmarks along the narrow streets, but they seemed to interest him abnormally.

"Actually got a trolley line up the hill," he frowned and smiled. "I remember how they talked about it ten years, while we were laying the whole West with lines; wonder if they've got a transfer service yet?"

"Oh, yes," Howard replied, laughing; "but it's still esteemed a daring innovation; they are talking of letter boxes on the cars."

"There's the old chop house—I dare say you've sampled it?" He looked wih twinkling eyes at his son, and his son twinkled back.

"I dare say I have."

"And—upon my word!—there's old Ripton walking up the street exactly as he used to at this hour—fifty, a hundred years ago." He smiled delightedly. "Well, well! I've been told if I came back I'd find the same people doing the same thing at the same hour—but I didn't believe it. The West takes that out of me.

"Ah, there's the old library! In my day that was the haunt of all the pretty girls; immensely studious lot they were, but always on this side of the building—college side; we used to wonder what they kept on the shelves on the other side."

The little chuckle with which he said this died suddenly as he glanced up at his son for an answering smile; the young man was looking distinctly embarrassed, and an awkward silence succeeded. It was a relief to both that the hotel obligingly broke it, obtruding its brand new bulk.

"We stood in this very window."

"You'd like me to wait for you, wouldn't you, father?" the young man asked courteously, yet he fidgeted visibly as he asked.

The elder man looked up; already his thoughts had wandered.

"No; if you don't mind, I'll come up a little later; you must have plenty to attend to at your rooms, and the fact is, I've a little business of my own."

His son opened his eyes wide.

"Business!—in this town! You are not thinking of buying a cotton mill, are you?"

The elder man laughed good naturedly.

"Never mind what I'm going to buy; go and look after your spread. I'll turn up presently."

"All right"—there was a suspicious alacrity in the assent; "I'd like to make sure Prendergast doesn't forget the ice or something—but you won't be late?" He turned at the door to add mischievously: "Sure you know the way?"

"Considering I tramped hollows in it before you were born—yes," retorted his father. "Trot along, you only have one senior class day!"

Apparently the reminder had been heeded, if needed; the elder man, listening, heard him take the stairs in two plunges, and smiled with grim sympathy. No; one had only one senior class day!

Left to himself, he made a very accurate toilet and descended the stairs with due dignity; nobody could have conceived how near his son's, for once, was the heart under the dignified exterior. One had but one senior class day!

Outside the hotel he turned deliberately away from the college, and as deliberately chose a street that led away from the business districts; evidently his business was of a particular nature. It was June, growing into an early dusk, and the city of elms and lawns was busy concealing in that green cloak a multitude of sins.

As he walked, the quaint beauty of the place struck him, although quaintness was the last virtue the ambitious manufacturing town pretended to or would have been grateful for. It saw itself as an important metropolis; it looked, to the outsider, a peaceful, innocent New England scholastic town; and it was a corrupt little plutocracy, with a social scale nicely adjusted to the number of spindles in its mills. Moreover, it was a bigoted and sectarian little city, and, by a natural compensation for its bigotry and slowness, its university was known for a very automobile among universities in the matter of pace; yet in it the man who knew both the golden West and Harvard had elected to immolate his only son.

And he knew no repentance even yet; rather the atmosphere of the place was working like yeast within him, and feelings, dormant for thirty years, were rising in the ferment of spirit. The further he got away from the college, the nearer he felt to it, and he continued, without a mistake of a turning, straight toward the goal of a desire which had suddenly stirred into being with his thoughtless little jest about the library, and grown instantly to an overmastering impulse.

It was not far—nothing was far in this town; the man from Chicago had the sense of a toy village with toy streets of an almost impossible steepness, every one of them heavily roofed over with elms or maple. The queer old wooden houses sat primly in their detached gardens; many of them still had the old time dignity of secluding fences—wood or iron; a few only of the more pretentious had cast this decency away, obeying the modern tendency to live on the sidewalk. And it was June—June with the apple trees still in late blossom, and the pregnant promise of the hot, thick New England summer close at hand, all unlike the keen torridity of the West.

"How long ago did I walk here?" the Western man asked himself with amusement.

To play that it all amused him was a way of keeping the incident in its place, a measure of self-respect, and he played it diligently at intervals, for in his heart he was sharply aware of a growing sensation—something which gripped him like a physical pain—or was it a pleasure? He walked on up the street (for now he was on the street), going very slowly past remembered spots.

Part of the way was parked and there were benches; how many summer evenings like this he had spent on one of them trying to solve the problem—to call or not to call. Some of his fellows had no such scruples; they called seven nights in succession; but he had had even in his youth a strain of that dignity or caution which had stood him in such good stead since; he had never liked to cheapen himself; three or four times a week, as he remembered it, had been about his limit. He smiled again—with amusement of course.

And now as he drew near a certain stretch of elm shaded walk he walked slower yet. About here, he told himself with a smile now positively cynical, his heart had always begun to beat faster. Would she—it being June, and a night like this—be out on her doorstep or not? In those days people sat on their doorsteps. And would there be any one with her—or not?

There was the house garden—for a moment a positive clutch assailed him. He found himself deliberately thanking heaven there was no one on the steps; but he made that all right with himself by the increased cynicism of his laugh. Of course, no one would be there!—even thirty years ago—they would all be at the campus.

In the shadow of the nearest tree he stopped and leaned deliberately on the top of the gate—it was the same old gate, he felt sure; he touched the latch with his fingers—it had the same old squeak. And then for a moment he stopped laughing and lost all regard for his own opinion.

There were roses growing against the fence; there had been roses then. Casting a quick look around the deserted street he leaned over and gathered one—a little white blossom—and, taking from his pocket a massive leather book laid it away among his business papers. They dealt with big money affairs—those papers. At that moment, all put together, they were not worth to him what the little rose had stood for. Tempi passati! Oh, days of youth! "Youthful sentiment," he would have said yesterday—but that was before he had stood here, where all at once things which had been dreams rarely recalled for years became realities again.

Realities! Had there been any other realities in life half so real? He had lived a full man's life, full of stir and energy and enterprise, a self-respecting life, and been largely successful even by the American standard. There was nothing particularly to regret or be ashamed of; but how far, seen now, it had been from the life he dreamed of in those days, those good days of his youth.

It had been a fast little college town even then; there had been plenty of things that had better not have happened even in a fast little college town; but somehow this house, the associations wihch surrounded it, the influences it shed, all that it stood for and that emanated from it, had sweetened and cleansed the whole for him. He had been a better man in that fast little college town than he had ever been since. Nobody else might know it—but he knew it himself.

He had been capable of things then he had never been capable of again. And all because of what? He acknowledged to himself now that all his obstinate insistence in sending Howard there had been due to this one thing. He had seen, unconsciously, his whole college life in the light of that association.

It was for this—for the sake of something missed out West—missed everywhere since; and he had never reflected that this might not come the boy's way. He had never even consciously desired it; he had other and definite plans for Howard; he had never even realized that the light which illuminated the college streamed directly from these doorsteps.

And she had trembled on the verge—when they had both trembled on the verge; the very spot beneath the trees, on their walk home of his class night, when in the softened tenderness of gathered memories, and touched with youth's first tragedy of parting, he should have spoken. For he was going to Europe and then to Harvard to please his father, exactly as he had planned that his son should go to Europe and then to Harvard to please him.

They had corresponded; he had seen her, off and on, through the Harvard years, and always he meant to speak one day; then came his years on the plains and in Chicago. He was older, more cautious; it seemed better to establish himself first. The business instinct which had made him a success engrossed him; letters grew fewer, visits rarer—and then—he heard of her marriage.

And he had not forgotten how he had felt when he heard. The daughter of a college professor, she had fulfilled her natural destiny and married the young professor of Greek and archæology—a man of his own class, a tall, slender boy, who even in those days had the scholar's lamp burning in his eyes, and had been conspicuously absent from all those walks and talks, those evenings and years.

A knot of undergraduates went by on the other side of the street, hurrying toward the campus, and as they went they sang from sheer exuberance of youth.

"Good night. Good night, beloved—!" their voices came floating back on the quiet air.

Good heavens! Did they sing that still? How many nights had they not sung that under the windows of how many girls!

On the way back to the college he thought with a whimsical tenderness of his son as a sort of extension of that early self of his. He resolved that he would deal gently with the boy's foolishness—it would be enough, probably, merely to get him away.

Time and absence, he reflected with momentary bitterness, could efface most images. Probably three months of Europe would serve to obliterate four years of X——. He resolved also to keep an observant eye upon him that evening, but to do nothing to spoil it—one has but one senior class day.

Then, with only a little less than his usual definitiveness, he dismissed the past and gave himself up to an old student's enjoyment of the present; for the college campus rose at the end of the street before him.

The old campus! What old graduate looks on it unmoved! Its elms looked no larger than they had looked thirty years ago to the magnifying eyes of youth; the same swaying festoons of Chinese lanterns illuminated the same happy crowd of youth beneath, the same half bored elders—only the elders now had been the youth of his day.

The same swaying festoons of Chinese lanterns illuminated the same happy crowd.

There were the girls, too—millions of them; not so pretty, of course, as the girls he remembered, but too pretty to be safe. He frowned again as he made his way toward the old dormitory. No need to direct him; his feet could have gone by themselves to the old room. On its threshold he was seized at once by his son.

"Father! I believe you did lose your way after all! There are a lot of your old friends here, and I want to introduce you."

In a moment he was surrounded and submerged. It was a very pretty and gay scene, an enlarged and enriched copy of the old class day spread, and under the windows, when he presently made his way to one, there flowed the same river of evening suits, dainty gowns, big hats and fresh faces, all to the strains of the same familiar college airs.

In his interest in the respectful attentions of Howard's young friends and the cordial reminiscences of old ones, he quite forgot to keep that observant eye on his son which he had planned to do. It was his son instead who presently hunted him up.

"Pater!—there are some old friends of yours," he said hurriedly, in his flushed duty of host—and tore him away to another recessed window where two or three young ladies and an elder one were looking out. It was to the elder one his son spoke.

"Here he is, Mrs. Thacher; Pater, you remember Mrs. Thacher?"

She turned and he found himself looking straight into the candid eyes of his youth.

Tempi passati! The slim girl had become, as slim girls will, a matronly woman; the pretty hair—still pretty—was gray; but there were not two pairs of eyes like that in the whole world. He stood a moment looking silently into them and then she smiled—the old smile—and they shook hands, as sane and socially educated people do in any extremity, and while he hunted in his unprepared mind (Howard should have prepared him! —but how should Howard know there was anything to prepare?) for the trivial phrase with which to renew speech she spoke without either hunting or triviality.

"How wonderful to meet here—after thirty years." His ear jealously detected the tone of the girl's voice enriched into the woman's. It

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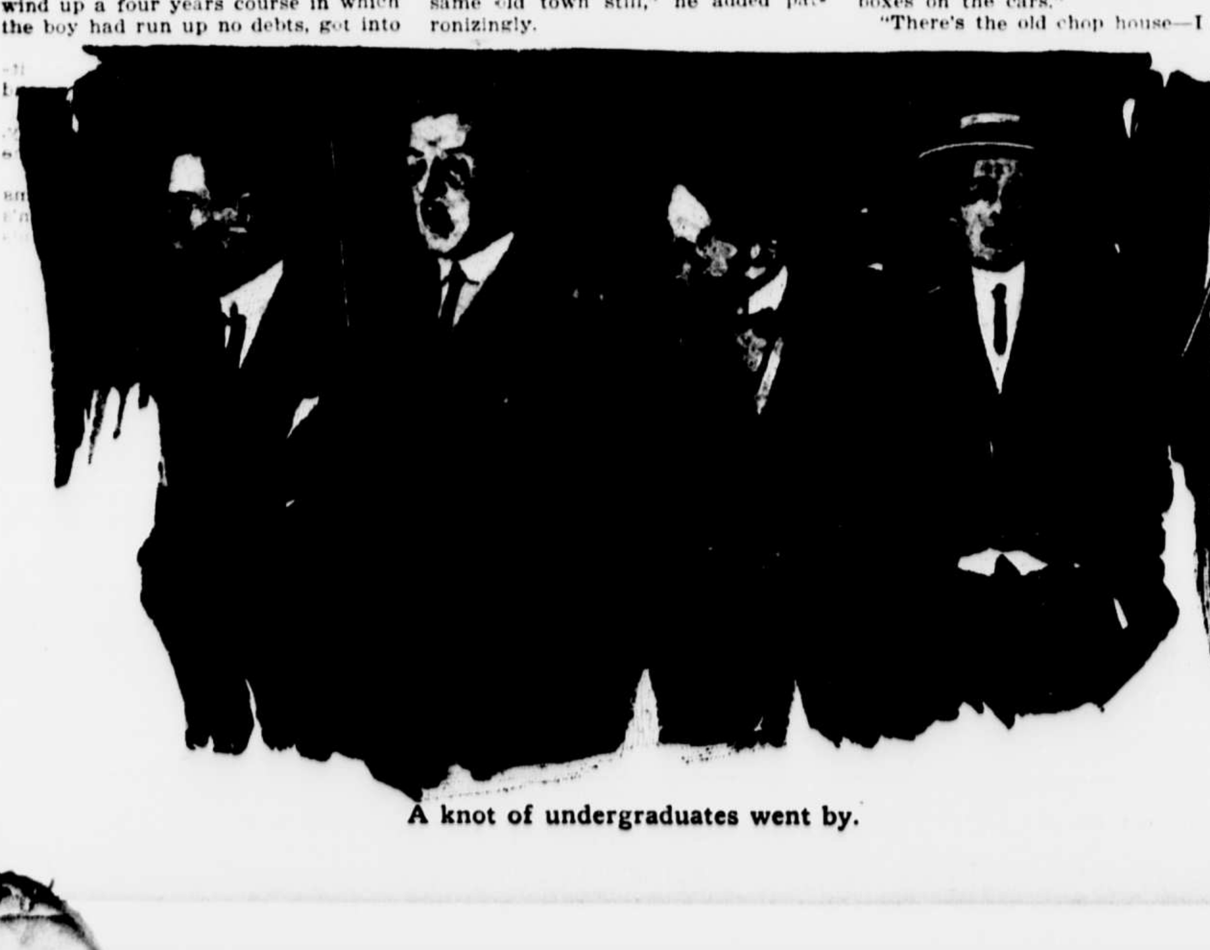

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