

HENRY W. LISTER

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It is perhaps unprofitable curiosity which prompts inquiry, in this year of grace, into the ways and destiny of a young man who crossed our academic skies and disappeared, meteor-like, in mid-course, a hundred years ago. But many things are unprofitable, and few are as pleasant as the investigation of things we were not meant to know.

Henry W. Lister came to the faculty of Delaware College in a day of short and unsatisfactory appointments. Before he had been six months on campus Professor James S. Bell had followed the tradition laid down by the Bells in the early college, and made himself so unpopular with the faculty that they felt compelled to petition the trustees for his removal. Rev. Benjamin J. Wallace, who succeeded the Rev. George Allen as professor of Greek and Latin Languages and Literature shortly before Lister's undated departure, was eliminated in 1847 at a price and in a flame that scathed not the college only but the whole community. Lister's unrecorded going might so easily have been such an affair that there is a tendency not to question.

In the spring of 1844 the Prudential Committee of the Board of Trustees of Delaware College was authorized by the Board to fill the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Francis J. Warner "to assist the professor of languages, with a salary of five hundred dollars, and also to engage a tutor at a salary of four hundred dollars, procuring if possible one who will teach the French and Spanish languages." The committee went about its business and on July 12 presented its report. On motion of Rev. A. Hamilton it was "resolved that Mr. Henry W. Lister be appointed tutor for the next term." Modern languages had been introduced into the curriculum in 1841, Lister's junior year at what was then Newark College, and presumably he had spent a part of the year since his graduation in Oct., 1843, improving his French and Spanish, but a shift in schedule gave him the ancient languages, and except for a few weeks in the fall of 1845, between the resignation of Professor Allen and the appointment of Professor Wallace, he appears never to have departed from them.

* Librarian.

Lister was a Philadelphian who had come to Newark not as a Freshman, but in the summer of 1840 or 1841 and had grown up, for the most part under the second Gilbert administration. He had lived at the College in room no. 25, first with Alfred H. Dashiell, and then with the younger but more scholarly John W. Mears who hailed, like himself, from Philadelphia. He graduated in 1843, at the age of nineteen, at the head of his class and a member of the Athenaeum Literary Society which he had served as president during the summer of 1843. William P. Dorsey, Alexander McRae and Richard Mullikin who were Freshmen in his Senior year remembered him with affection and drew up a sincere and moving resolution when he died.

School opened in 1844 on Thursday, the 29th of August and except for the controversy over the use of the Oratory by Mr. Graham and his Academy boys for their exhibition, and the participation of the college Freshman therein, the new tutor played well the part of the new tutor, and appears not at all in the college records. His vote against the exhibition appears strange at first glance. When it developed that the faculty were constrained to grant a morning off for clearance and recuperation after the event, it is remembered that he was seeing the affair with the eyes of one recently come up from the washing, and that age and experience might in this instance have taken a page from the book of youth.

He must have been interested too, and possibly distressed, at the action taken by the faculty in early September to adjust an inequality which had grown up between the Athenaeum and Delta Phi Literary societies; but there was a general agreement, and it was not until both societies expressed their dissatisfaction with the working of the new arrangement, in quite different directions, that he was called upon to take a hand in the matter. With the new year, however, Henry Lister began coming, mildly, into his own. John A. Porter, upon whom the professorship of languages had fallen at Bell's departure, resigned the secretaryship of the faculty on January 6, and Lister's handwriting which had appeared last in the college archives with his retirement as secretary of his literary society on May 21, 1842, reappears in the faculty minutes, a little more mature, and a trifle less difficult to decipher.

It was a year of "drives." In January the Athenaeum Society, stricken with apprehension lest the new regulations might do harm, and supporting an unusually inactive membership, resorted to a kind of literary barrel-day, offering easy forgiveness of accumulated fines

to members who should return to the fold within the period of the next two meetings, and threatening loss of library privilege to those who did not avail themselves of the opportunity. Little came of it, and whether or not the use of the library fell off does not appear.

The faculty sponsored the second drive, a back-to-church affair, in which they prospered a little better than the Athenaeans, but were forced to resort, as the boys were not, to compromise with the enemy. It came in the form of a collision between two drives, for the Episcopalians and certain others who may have fancied church attendance would be less irksome or less rigorously supervised in the newly finished St. Thomas Church on the Elkton road, appealed for and eventually received permission to attend the church of their choice. But here, too, not all was as planned, for President Gilbert appointed as Episcopal monitor no less person than Thomas R. Blandy who as a town boy, and the son of good Episcopalians would be under an eye as keen as his own.

February saw something new in drives: again a compromise with the forces of evil, but a very happy compromise as it turned out. The ever forward-looking, but too frequently backward-acting Athenaeon Society beat their Delta Phi neighbors to the concept of an anniversary address, for this summer was to mark the completion of the college's first working decade, and, not to revive in too much unpleasantness the question of who was older, a good time to celebrate their something-or-other-eth birthdays. Athenaeon had no money. That was common knowledge in 1845. And Delta Phi was rich—so rich that they were presently to pay a fabulous sum to cover the hall rug with linen, whereas Athenaeon Hall was largely uncarpeted, and it was only by resorting to philosophy that one accounted for this difference in two bodies which, if we may judge on the basis of the remnants of their libraries, were at heart as similar as the proverbial two peas. So the Athenaeans appealed—no, communicated with—Delta Phi which caught its several and collected breaths, and not to be outdone, cooperated. Most of the details are to be learned from the minutes of the latter body. The Athenaeans, like the faculty, were too busy recording the names of the absent, the tardy, and the delinquent to note more than the high spots in the year's experience. The speech, when it came off on the 25th of June, was one of those high spots. It is to be hoped that the venerable Willard Hall never learned that he was the last of several eminent persons asked on the occasion. He may well have been gratified at the request for publi-

cation, and it need not have come to his ears that both societies were paying for the printing well into the autumn, Delta Phi by assessment, and Athenaeon by means too devious to discover or comprehend. To their credit be it said that the resolution to elect honorary members and then approach them for donations was quashed in an early stage of debate. That technique was reserved for the faculty.

The youthful Lister, meanwhile, was invited to speak in Athenaeon Hall on Washington's birthday and faculty, families and friends had an opportunity to hear this once, and only once, the new instructor. That the Athenaeans thought it great goes without saying; but the ordinary brand of courtesy did not require that he be approached first by one committee and then by another, when modesty or good sense stood adamant against publication. When last heard of, the matter was in the hands of George Bagby who was ordered to secure the speech, copy it off and "lay it in the archives of Society."

In the midst of this festivity heaven blessed College with a double windfall, first in the consecration of the Episcopal Church, for which 11 o'clock classes were excused on the 25th of February, and then in the celebration, on the 27th, of a Day of Prayer for Colleges. Thus early had the group consecration of days and weeks begun!

The first day of March saw Delta Phi's great drive under way. It came as agitation for a new badge and resulted, after trials and much weariness of the flesh, in a new society pin and a bill for something over forty dollars.

Then, in April, came the drive in which Lister was to play an important if unobtrusive part. On the 19th of that month a special committee of Delta Phi met to discuss the shifty ways of their neighbors and, on the 21st, the society approached the faculty with a complaint that the Athenaeon Society was admitting new members in a manner not proscribed by the faculty action of the previous September. President Gilbert undertook "to ascertain the truth in the case and in the event of said charges proving true" publicly to "declare the act of the Athenaeon society in admitting members to their body contrary to the regulations of College, illegal. . . ." But the truth was either hard to come by or the Delta Phi Society had become unduly exercised, for the matter was dropped until the Athenaeans themselves brought it up in August. By that time things were going badly indeed, and Lister's Athenaeon friends appealed, presumably through him, in a long and anxiously argumentative document in which the faculty pointed out errors of composition instead of reading

the handwriting on the wall. Lister was instructed "to inform them of such errors, and correct their misapprehensions." He did not like this business of being caught between loyalties to two institutions, but he kept his head better than he usually did when he found himself subjected to the cold light that beats upon the secretary. In almost every instance in which he found it necessary to record references to himself in the minutes of the faculty, Lister became flustered and muffed the minutes, so that he needed to obliterate one or more words or, in one case, stood corrected if the minutes were read at the succeeding meeting. On this occasion, however, he seems to have taken "the correction of misapprehensions" to mean the allaying of them and it was a happy-go-lucky society that met, as S. K. Wilson had once said, "as usual about twenty minutes after the proper time," on the thirtieth of August.

It was on this evening when Delta Phi was taking itself seriously over the justice of imprisoning men for debt (having forgot for the nonce the evil ways of their neighbors) that the Athenaeans took the bull of sanitation by the horns and "resolved that the janitor be requested to clean the spit boxes belonging to the hall." The janitor in question was no other than Nathan Rench, of whom what must be the original boot-leg tale is told; but that is another story and has nothing to do with Henry Lister.

The case of Samuel H. Adams, of the Senior class, who had been subject to discipline and admonition in the previous autumn had not improved with the passage of time and was again referred to the faculty on the 28th of April. The secretary drew the task of communicating with Adams' family and reacted as usual. The letter no doubt was good. We have one of Lister's letters and it stands up well against the letters of the period and very well indeed among those of men who have not yet reached majority. But the faculty minutes, taken down at the meeting, are a sad affair.

That evening, thirty seven days before the Mexican declaration of war, the Delta Phi Society set for debate the question "Would Mexico be justifiable in declaring war against the United States on account of the annexation of Texas." Whether or not the debate ever came off and what the decision was, are curiously not recorded. But spring was upon us and Delta Phi was slipping, for it was on this evening that the society, on the nomination by Wm. Henry Purnell, elected Lister to honorary membership and not until someone reading the minutes at the end of the following August raised a question, was

it discovered that the membership committee had failed to function. He was notified at once, under date of August 30, and on September 1 he wrote:

"I rec'd your communication of Saturday last, announcing my election as an Honorary member of the Delta Phi Soc. Permit me, Gentleman [sic.], in reply, to express my warm acknowledgements for the compliment you have paid me and to assure you of the lively interest, which, as a friend to Literature and its votaries, I feel in the prosperity of your association. An honour such as you have conferred is ever gratefull to the feelings: but its value is in this case doubly enhanced by the fact, that the peculiar relation which I have hitherto sustained toward your old rival render this act of yours, a noble specimen of generous and high-minded feeling. With every wish for your own prosperity, as well as that of the society you represent

I remain with much esteem
Your friend

Henry W. Lister."

It was a mildly startled society which read the letter and, after the thoroughgoing Delta Phi manner, copied it into the minutes. There is no evidence that he ever attended a meeting of the society. We know, as he could not, that his recent sponsorship of the Athenaeans bore no relation to his election. Or was it he who broke to Delta Phi the news that they had been unduly excited when they appealed to the faculty in April? President Purnell could have told us that.

Then, on the fourth of May, comes what seems to have been the first of the serial society papers. Stated readers had been compiling pretty elementary news, personal and joke sheets since the early meetings of both societies; and manuscript papers under various names have come down to us and are in the college archives from as early as 1850; but on May 4, 1845, there appeared a named paper which continued for about five months: "The Bitter Pill." Near the end of the year it was succeeded or supplemented by "The Mirror." Both have perished, and rightly so, for on more than one occasion the society secretary had to record that "a part" or "a few pieces" of the paper had been read.

On this night, also, they debated the expediency of corporal punishment in the Academy. One speculates at some length on the background of the debate, corporal punishment having been known,

though possibly not well known in the College under President Mason.

In May, too, came the peace drive. We were on the brink of war with Mexico, never a popular movement in Delaware, and the faculty presented to the library of Delta Phi (and presumably to the Athenaeans, who, busy in a revived enthusiasm for attendance, failed to record the gift) several volumes and a handful of pamphlet literature on peace. They were recognized, eventually, as propaganda and did not come down to the university library as has so great a part of both society collections.

On May 11, Lister spoke briefly and privately before Athenaeon Society and the boys who had learned that no good came of asking for publication privilege thanked him quietly and retired.

The next day the secretary was again in a fluster. The faculty voted to ask that their salaries be set up on a pro rata basis and to Lister was assigned the task of communicating with the treasurer of the Board and asking him to fix a day on which the checks would be paid regularly. This smacked of dictation to the Almighty and the faculty minutes bear witness to nerves.

In mid-May, after stoves had been removed, a cold wave struck the village and the Athenaeans, unable to brook the weather in Hall, went (we are led to suppose) home and to bed. But the end of the stove menace was not yet. The Trustees, sitting on June 24, listened to its committee on stoves and furnaces and granted the committee power to install one or more furnaces in the College. But the committee was not ready to go into action. Furnaces meant flues and a general tearing up of the building, and in December they reported finally in the negative. The Athenaeon brothers, meanwhile, lost their stove, along with their stove pipe, but whether it was mislaid in the depths of the cellar, buried by the furnace committee in their zeal, or dumped down the stairs in the dead of night after the manner of students both before and after Lister's time, is not clear. There is a last wistful reference to the Athenaeon stove on October 25, when it was resolved to polish it if and when found. By November 8 a good angel in the person of Nathan Rench had found the stove, but the pipe must be bought from Society funds and whether this combination of circumstances altered the resolution to polish, is not a matter of record.

The imaginative reader will see in the decision of the Board to continue heating by stoves the hand of destiny. If the stoves had

gone, he will reason, there would have been no stove in Anthony Higgins' room on the 30th of March, 1858. And if Higgins had had no stove there would have been no smoke from burning Assinorum. Hence no murder, and who shall say what might have become of the college? But this is going very far afield.

Two Freshmen, Layton and Fairfax, came before the faculty on June 9 for what that august body took to be a surfeit of absences, both from recitations and from prayers, and to the unhappy Lister fell the task of informing the parents that their sons had been admonished and were under discipline. Whether the faltering style of the minutes is the result of misunderstanding or of confusion, could be determined only if the succeeding record showed that the minutes had been read and corrected. This not being the habit of the faculty in 1845, we are permitted to assume that the secretary mistook himself for the president, or the president for himself, and the state of Layton and Fairfax being worse rather than better thereafter, it is not impossible that he took his error seriously as a kind of *Sors Gilbertianae*, and left to the uninformed neglect of the president a task which he found distasteful in the extreme.

Five days later Athenaeon Society, playing Mary as always to Delta Phi's Martha, arrived first at a debate on the advantages of public as over against private education. Delta Phi was abreast of the question by the middle of the following October, by which time the Athenaeans, shivering in a stoveless room, were facing with meager success the problem of tobacco in any or all forms. Members of Delta Phi, if they presumed to use tobacco in the presence of the linen covered carpet, were admonished privately, and not made subject to record. Or, horrid thought, was that the function of the linen cover?

There were examinations in June, followed by a determination of annual averages on which Junior exhibition and the printing of the Commencement program depended. On the 23rd the faculty approved (forsooth) the President's report to the Board of Trustees and appended a recommendation that a system of prizes be established as rewards for eminence in particular branches. Prof. Allen asked and was granted permission to approach one or more members of the Board on the subject of authorizing department heads to use their discretion about the conduct of Academy classes in which there were boys who were not preparing for college. Whether Prof. Allen thought better of it, or whether the members were not interested and

therefore never introduced the question for discussion is not as important now as the appearance of the concept of terminal education at Delaware College a hundred years ago. In the light of current faculty discussions it is interesting to note that, though entrance to the college at irregular times was not recommended, neither was it prohibited, and entrance examinations appear at scattered intervals through the record of the year.

The Trustees met at the College on June 24, and in addition to indicating approval of the installation of furnaces (later withdrawn) they appropriated \$30 for small prizes, and \$40 for the college library, received the resignation of Wm. S. Graham, principal of the Academy, who was succeeded by W. W. Ferris and crowned all past indiscretions by approving, along with "other ornaments" the erection of the belfry which was to furnish the town with an eyesore and the faculty with a source of disquiet until well into the present century.

The faculty, meanwhile, were holding a final meeting summing up grades, failures, conditions and re-examinations; and the Delta Phi Society took advantage of an hour of leisure to call a farewell meeting and confer diplomas on its departing members. Is it legitimate to wonder what devilry was afoot in Athenaeon Hall? In the evening Dr. Joel Parker and the Rev. John L. Grant, both members of the Board, addressed the students in the Oratory, and \$40 worth of music was consumed by students, faculty, community and friends. But there was yet a feast of reason to follow this flow of soul. On the evening of June 25th—but I have told you of the Hon. Willard Hall's address to the joint literary societies, how avidly it was consumed and how, when it was printed, it became a drug on the market.

The new term opened in August with new students, new problems and new zeal. The unexpected resignation of Prof. George Allen created both a problem and a need for zeal. The faculty meeting on August 11 was notable. Prof. Porter, who had succeeded to the librarianship along with the professorship of languages, was authorized to spend a part of the \$40 appropriated to the library in the purchase of an unabridged Webster. And Lister came into his own. To him was assigned the receipt of excuses, reports of absence, and general bill of health and conduct of the two lower classes to whom, having never known him as a student, he could, if need be, play the ogre. And to him and Prof. Porter was entrusted the "arrangements for supplying temporarily the vacancy occasioned in the de-

partment of languages by the resignation of Prof. Allen," no common task for a man just turning 21, and Oh! how he muffed the minutes!

At that meeting, too, the rules for conduct on Sundays and in Hall and at study hours were revised. Music was ruled out of the public corridors at *all* times (so deeply had \$40 worth of music shaken the fabric of learning) and the practice of musical instruments was restricted to the hours between 10:30 at night and 10 in the morning; but as to which of the intervals between those limits the ruling is not clear.

On the 18th Joseph W. Parker applied for entrance and is set down as admitted in a minute which leaves the impression that the faculty found his case a bitter one and retired in the midst of the examination for prayer. It is perhaps an unhappy wording, accountable as was also his misdating August 18 as August 19, to failing health.

House cleaning overtook the Delta Phi Society (*it never* overtook the Athenaeans) at the end of August, and along with the discovery of the membership Committee's sins of omission, they took stock of books in need of binding and it is here that the Society presents itself for all time to see. The librarian presenting for their approval, among others, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *German Romances* and *Don Quixote*; they rejected the three named as unworthy of rebinding and recommended "*The History of the Reformation.*"

The Rev. Benjamin J. Wallace succeeded Prof. Allen at the beginning of September and relieved Lister of a part of his extra duties, but he proved to be that most pestiferous of academic nuisances, the new broom that sets about sweeping all things clean. So live a wire was he that he had appealed to the boys everywhere, and the Athenaeon Society leading again, elected him to honorary membership on the 10th and Delta Phi followed on the 13th. By the 15th he had evolved a plan for rescuing the school from impending financial crisis by memorializing the Synods of Pennsylvania and Virginia and repaying their financial support by permitting them to sit in on the college examinations. The discussion dragged on and the faculty, who must even then have foreseen the day when this evil must be eradicated by appeal, vacillated between the vision of an easy budget and the certain error of entrusting an old machine to the hands of an enthusiastic novice. And so it was that the faculty yielded to the temptation the Athenaeon Literary Society had risen above months before.

The day that saw the opening of Wallace's fund-raising campaign saw, too, the addition of a new duty to Lister's schedule; a duty which he did not see completed. The printing of the college catalogue which had been the work of the President and Prof. Porter, was this year assigned to Prof. Norton and the secretary. It appeared before the end of the year, but with the name of Walter S. F. Graham in the place of Lister's. His health had failed during the autumn and the death of Simon A. Wilson of the class of '45, sobering to the student body, must have come as a special shock to Lister who had known him both as fellow student and as pupil.

Just when Henry Lister left the college it is not now possible to determine. Several pages have been left blank in the faculty minute book before Prof. Porter appears on Nov. 30th as secretary *pro tem*. There may have been no meetings, or meetings with no minutes taken, or minutes taken on scratch paper until the book was found—locked up in his room, and never filled in. The Board, meeting on December 16 designated his departure as resignation, but granted him his salary to the end of the year, a circumstance which has given rise to the suspicion that this young tutor had risen above himself, possibly over the spectacular entrance of Wallace into the scene, and had been given a choice between resignation and dismissal with pay, such as Wallace was later given to ease him out without unpleasantness. The theory is reasonable on its face, but not supported by the facts. He died on September 25, 1846, after a lingering illness, and the news reached Newark on the 28th. The Athenaeum Society was called into two special sessions and passed a resolution on his death. But Delta Phi were busy counting books and catching up on debate; and the faculty, though they met, failed to note or comment upon the death of Lister. They too were busy about the affairs of a very present and a very troublesome world.

Athenaeum Literary Society. List of members, 1834-1880. Ms.

Athenaeum Literary Society. Minutes, 1837-1848. Ms.

Delaware College. Catalogue of the officers and students, 1843-44, 1844-45, 1845-'6. Wilmington, Porter & Naff, 1844-46. 3 v.

Delaware College. Faculty minutes, 1834-1847. Ms.

Delaware College. Trustees' Minutes, 1833-1872. Ms.

Delta Phi Literary Society. Minutes, 1839-1851. 2 v. Ms.

Newark College. Catalogue of the officers and students, 1841-42, 1842-43. Philadelphia, n.p., 1842, Wilmington, Porter & Naff, 1842. 2 v.