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Heaven and...

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Abstract

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Heaven and . . .

ON an afternoon last fall as I was sauntering from the Union to Beardshear I noticed a fellow standing some distance in front of me watching a squirrel. I was particularly interested in this squirrel-watcher, having noticed him last year when, apparently as a freshman, he had worn blue jeans, a jacket of the same material and sturdy black logger's boots. The transformation of wearing apparel in the comparatively short period of a year was astounding. Saddle shoes of dirty brown and black had replaced the clean, masculine lines of his logger's boots. A white nylon jacket with the inevitable turned up collar was left partially unzipped exposing the tan, bulky knit sweater which he was wearing even though the temperature was about seventy degrees.

The light blue wash pants he was wearing were kosher for this year's Union Rat. High on each hip there was a cute little buckle apparently evolved from last year's single buckle which was so much more . . . ah . . . ah . . . single. There were flaps on his pockets ostensibly to provide a handy enclosure for white mice which might be stealthily purloined from the genetics laboratory and joyously distributed to appropriate sorority houses.

Well at least, I sighed, the man is a notch above the average "Commons Bridge Player." He has retained the individuality to watch a squirrel when he feels like watching a squirrel.

Alas, my idealistic illusions were abruptly smashed. Hearing my footsteps, the squirrel-watcher wheeled, his face metamorphosed from honest, clean interest to bored condescension. He mumbled something about "losing a quarter," ashamedly kicked a rock at the amazed squirrel and shuffled to the Union, heel plates clicking sullenly.

What gargantuan influence had caused marked modification of apparel? Even more important what had instigated

his change in countenance as I approached? Acceptance? Probably; most assuredly.

This boy, in one school year, had become an integral part of the "acceptable campus attitude." This malady is based upon the fear that someone will realize that a college pupil doesn't know everything. To allay this fear one must pretend to know everything or at least pretend to be bored with that which he doesn't understand, which in some cases may involve a fairly substantial amount.

To present a basic premise: it is my belief that a person should come to college with the idea of obtaining an education. I hasten to identify education as that combined body of attitudes, knowledge and developed skill which enables an individual to realize his potential and channel it into the most constructive use. Education should not be confused with "degree gathering" or "job-certificate procurement."

The basis for education must be observation and intelligent assimilation of facts, and my squirrel-watcher was stricken with a dual inadequacy. He had become ashamed of his honest observation of objects and animals which he had heretofore found interesting. After all, watching a shaggy, fall-furred rodent eat a dirty old walnut is not nearly so profound as playing bridge in the Commons or lighting a sorority girl's sophisticated cigarette.

The second flaw in my squirrel-watcher is inextricably involved with the first in that he was afraid of being observed. His uniform fit in with all the comfortable standards on what one of the "group" should wear. It was not necessary for him to choose what type of clothes to wear. He had merely to look around him to find out what the "others" were wearing.

When bending under the weight of social conditioning my boy had allowed himself to stagnate and degenerate into acceptance. Poise was his accomplishment for a year of diligent self-degradation. Poise is the ability of a person to arrive at a superficial solution to a superficial problem in an artificial social situation and should in no way be confused with maturity. Maturity allows a person to face the myriad situations of life with confidence and ability.

If you should chance into the Commons on some frigid day this winter, then look about to see the poised boredom-bloated visages which mirror mass production ignorance.

And next spring when you have that impulsive urge to stop and watch a pair of mating ladybird beetles, *do it!* Ignore the children about you who are prancing to and from class — those hollow souls whose expressions resemble spring-awakening woodchucks, having been conditioned by Commons lighting.

Endeavor to follow your natural inclination as a substitute for cultural conditioning as unnatural as it may seem, for this is a wedge toward honest observation and constructive thought. If, insipid soul, you find it unbearable to stand on the sidewalk watching ladybird beetles mate, then trundle on to class or back to the Union. It is possible that two of the most stringent requirements for admission into Heaven are saddle shoes and dual-buckle flap-covered pockets, or the feminine equivalent. If such is the case, then Heaven will probably have a genetics laboratory so that white mice may be procured for liberation in the appropriate girls' dormitories and sororities.

— Cole Foster, S. Sr.