

G. Stanley Hall Recalls His Antioch Years, 1872-1876 (from "Life and Confessions of a Psychologist," 1924)

The 14 March 2011 issue of The New Yorker featured a long article by Harvard University Professor of History Jill Lepore on the pioneering American psychologist G. Stanley Hall and his studies on aging. Hall in recent years has become something of a whipping post in his field, and virtually all of his theories have been thoroughly discredited, yet he remains a foundational figure in psychology. He was also once a member of the Antioch College faculty. In his memoir Life & Confessions of a Psychologist, published in 1924, he devoted a few lines to his four years here as a Professor of Mental Philosophy and English Literature, 1872-1876. Typical of a memoir, his memory fails him on occasion, but Hall drops several familiar Antioch names, including that of Rebecca Rice from the class of 1860, and relates the inevitable jack-of-all-trades

nature of his position as a rookie professor in a very small college. Perhaps most interesting of all the reminiscences reprinted here is the account of his investigations into a paper writing scam run out of the village known alternatively as

The Great Western Literary Bureau
and

The Great American Literary Association,

which for a nominal fee would write a paper for any college student unwilling or unable to do the work themselves.

It was while I was with the Seligmans [Jesse Seligman, a New York area banker] that I one day received a call from James K. Hosmer, whom I had met in Europe, the author of Thinking Bayonets and other works. He was leaving his chair at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, for a larger field and offered me his place there; this I gladly accepted. Antioch College had been founded as a western outpost of Unitarianism which here sought to amalgamate with the Christian denomination, which believed in the Bible without theology. But the fusion was always more apparent than real. Christians had founded the institution some decades before as the result of an enthusiastic campaign to give their clergy and young people a taste of the higher education, and Horace Mann, after he had lost favor in Boston, spent the last fourteen years [six, actually] of his life here as its first president, bringing, I believe, a substantial endowment fund gathered from Unitarian sources.

The first year I boarded with the president, the venerable George Washington Hosmer, father of my predecessor and teacher of morals and philosophy. My chair at first was a whole settee, embracing English, French, and German language and literature. In one class we read Egmont, Faust, and Goetz von Berlichingen; in another, Racine and Moliere; and in yet another, Shakespeare, etc. The institution was one of the pioneers in coeducation and we had a select body of mature young ladies who came from a wider area and were, on the whole,

superior to the men, who were more local. Although there was a large preparatory school connected with it, it had always striven in the academic department, in which all my work lay, for high standards; and although it was small, the little faculty was very ambitious to do the best work possible and there was much talk about maintaining Harvard standards.

The second year and the two later ones I passed there, four in all, were very stimulating although my activities were extremely varied. I was librarian, leader of the choir, and sometimes organist, took my turn with, I think, four others in conducting church services on Sunday, held rhetorical exercises evenings, formed intimate personal associations with the students, some of whom were older than

I, and taught them as best I could. The second year, when the president left and was succeeded by the genial and expert geologist, Edward Orton, later for many years president of the Ohio State University at Columbus, and father of the distinguished neurologist, I was able to devote most of my time to teaching philosophical subjects as I would. I was an enthusiast for Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley, and as the religious spirit was free I could do practically what I would. It was during my stay here that the first volume of [Wilhelm] Wundt's Physiological Psychology was published, which I devoured. This eventually led me to resign in order to go to Leipzig to study 'with him.

From Antioch I several times made excursions to St. Louis to spend Saturday evening with the Hegelian, William T. Harris, who had won national fame by his educational reconstruction of the St. Louis schools, which was widely copied. Here Schneider, Thomas Davidson, and a German thinker of much note and ability whose name I forget, and sometimes, I think, Miss [Susan] Blow of kindergarten fame, listened to expositions of Hegel by Harris, and of Aristotle by Davidson.

My work at Antioch was diversified, but although the penumbra was wide there was a solid nucleus to it all. One year I had to teach Anglo-Saxon, of which I knew nothing and had to cram

from Corson [The Handbook of Anglo-Saxon and Early English, 1871] and Marsh [Origin and History of the English Language, 1862]. I also had to prepare Shakespearean dramas four times a year to be given in the Chapel, the platform of which was expressly built that it might be used as a stage for the benefit of the literary society. I had to choose and cut the play, assign the parts, prepare the scenery, suggest the costumes to the young women who made them, and act in every way as impressario. Occasionally I had to preach in the Unitarian church in Cincinnati, where I met Dr. Mayo, noted for his advocacy of a better education in the south; Dr. Vickers, the librarian, a man of great German scholarship; Judge [Johann Bernhard] Stallo, and occasionally spent a Sunday with the Tafts. Ex-President Taft was then a boy, and his father, Judge Alonzo Taft, was a Trustee of Antioch College.

Once a week during the winter I had to ride seven or eight miles to the colored Wilberforce College and lecture in a popular way to the student body, which was presided over by the really

venerable Dr. [Daniel] Payne. Here on one occasion my lectures were interrupted by an interesting outbreak of religious frenzy when an active revival was in progress. There was a temperance crusade in town in which the women took turns in standing before every place where liquor was sold and taking the names of every one who entered, day and night, a singular craze that spread far and wide.

Some of the older graduates of Antioch had founded and advertised

The Great American Literary Bureau,

which supplied compositions to students in different colleges for a fee. I was chairman of the college committee to break this up. We found several students in other institutions who had patronized them and who made full confessions, by publication of which we were able to suppress this traffic in brains. But as a result, when I happened to meet the leader of the organization on the street he took a revolver from his pocket and loaded it while passing me. Later, a bullet fired in my direction lodged in the post of the store a safe rod from where I was; another was fired through the window of my room a few nights later; while at a rhetorical evening exercise where I sat on the platform, a bottle of acid was thrown through the window, evidently directed at me but fell short and broke on the edge of the platform, spoiling my clothes and the dresses of some of the girls in the front row

There were occasional county educational meetings, and for one of these, I remember I prepared and gave my first address to teachers. At commencement not only the local but our most distinguished eastern trustees, Dr. Edward Everett Hale and Dr. [George] Bellows of New York, and Robert Collier, another trustee, were generally present for a few days and gave several addresses. They were all very companionable with the instructors. I greatly enjoyed the friendship here of my colleague, Professor Rebecca S. Rice, head of the mathematical department, who had studied in Germany and was a lady of great ability and refinement. Although she was much older than I, we struck up a great intimacy, not only in college but in town and church matters. I treasure highly the memory of this acquaintance, which lasted not only during my stay here but for many years after she had established a successful private school for girls in Chicago. Here, too, I formed the slight acquaintance of Cornelia Fisher, who was later to be my wife, whose father had retired from business in Cincinnati and lived in town upon a modest income.

The scenery of the vicinity was beautiful, as the college was situated near the edge of a very deep and long ravine and near a famous chalybeate spring, beside which an immense summer hotel had been built. The beautiful walks were always tempting to the students, and the chief disciplinary cases which came before the conservative faculty were the results of incessant pairings off

of the boys and girls for afternoon and evening rambles. I was always impressed with the way in which the strong feminine element dominated the college sentiment, and felt that the active boy student life that characterized other non-coeducational institutions was lamentably lacking because of this. At my age and stage of development, however, no experience could perhaps,

I had met President Eliot the summer before, when I called on him with a letter of introduction from Dr. Hale with a proposition that originated in the mind of my colleague, [Antioch College Trustee and former president] SC Derby, that Harvard should hold entrance examinations outside of Cambridge at different points, of which Antioch was to be one.

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