

A little time before I went to war I received a questionnaire from the University at which I received my degree. Among the questions was one which read : "What benefits do you consider you received during the four years you attended the University ?" In a moment of bitterness I wrote "None", and returned the questionnaire.

In this I was wrong and unfair for I did perhaps receive some benefits. I made some friends who remained friends. I did learn something about getting on with people and came to have some understanding regarding good books and I learned a few facts which remained in my mind. I think, quite honestly, that this was about all I got out of the four years spent there. The tormenting thing is the speculation which returns to me again and again that I might have learned much more during those four years by striking out into the world on my own. I might have gone to India or Sumatra or China. I might have met all sorts of people fascinating or strange or even evil but at least real. I might have starved or fallen ill in a strange country. I might have learned a language or two.

In doing so I might have lost or destroyed the middle-class complacency and paralysis which reduced my whole life to the monotonous level of uninspired work, material rewards, and conformity, out of which it became slowly apparent that the only escape was drinking... In a sense, the four years were spent in a vacuum — four years in which I was protected from almost all reality, four years in which I had neither to go to work nor to face the business of living. I emerged a pitifully immature specimen, in reality no older, no wiser, no more experienced than when I entered. In a way, the University only served to arrest my development and preserve my adolescence.

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