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Educational Institutions and Alumni

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TO be on guard against jumping at conclusions or taking things for granted is an ever-present responsibility. On occasion, review and appraisal of the situation is often helpful in maintaining a properly focused view of matters which we may be prone to take for granted. The relations and relative positions of an educational institution and its alumni may be illustrative of this type of condition.

In a broad sense, these two groups are a single agency and not separate units or interests. Great educational institutions are successful and beneficial in so far as they are able to provide an environment which fosters the acquisition and compilation of knowledge, while at the same time its application in a wise and intelligent manner is accomplished. These purposes are brought into realization in ways such as the maintenance of general and specialized laboratories, the detailing of men with particular interests and skills to research in special studies, and by other well known methods. It is not enough that one attend such an institution for a specified period and in effect be charged like a rocket and released on a specified day to pursue a fixed or erratic course until exhausted. It should be rather that by constant replenishment by contact with the source that the strength and usefulness of the product be ever increased and made more effective.

All graduates of scientific and engineering institutions probably will agree that their courses taken in college provided them with the basic tools with which to tackle the non-textbook problems in their chosen profession. They probably will agree that their education in the practice of their profession begins upon leaving the educational institution. Having agreed to these, one may conclude that after graduation their alma mater can play no further part in their education and that it becomes only fond memories to be resurrected once in a while at meetings of the alumni association or its chapters. This conclusion is far from correct. The educational institution and its alumni can be a mutual benefit association. This does not include the financial contributions of alumni to replenish the coffers of the

college. As the world progresses in its knowledge of science and engineering it is reasonable to expect that a great educational institution devoted to this work will have many opportunities to pass on to its alumni as well as students, the benefits of its experience. Continued association with the institution through correspondence or personal discussion can be helpful to both institution and alumni.

The thought may at times come to the minds of some graduates that due to the highly advanced technical and scientific work of an institution, they are out of step with events and lag behind the trend of affairs. If there are those who have this thought it should be pointed out that even some slight association such as attendance at social gatherings, seminars, or lectures establishes the contact which has unlimited possibilities of growth and development. There is probably no way of determining the degree to which men have been, shall we say, inspired to do things by contact with those who are doing them. An alumni association is one way of maintaining the contacts and making new ones.

While we are thinking of the various advantages to the alumni, accruing from the maintenance of reasonably close contact with the parent institution, let us not overlook the possible contributions which may be reciprocated. Perhaps one of the most delicate problems in educational institutions is the creation of just the right amount of so-called practical contact with the realities of the outside world. In the handling of this relation, the alumni have the opportunity of a very practical contribution. A little thought in retrospect will recall the great void in our minds during undergraduate days, as to the inner workings of many well known scientific and engineering organizations. The opportunity is apparent, so let us each endeavor to encourage the undergraduate to become better acquainted in order that we may at least make this small contribution to improved relations.

These few brief thoughts have been expressed with the hope that they may stimulate an improved condition in the relations between educational institutions and their alumni.