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## Adventures in Ideas

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# ADVENTURE IN IDEAS



YOUNG lad sat transfixed at the miracle which was being revealed before him. The sixth grade teacher was turning a crank upon a marvelous contraption. As the teacher turned the crank the globes revolved around each other and around a great golden sphere in the center. That morning the boy had awakened into a world that was reasonably simple. Each day he had watched the plate-sized sun come up in the east and, swinging over the sky, disappear into the west in the evening. It had never bothered him. He just thought that the sun moved over the flat farmland and disappeared to return again the next day.

Now the world seemed complicated. The teacher told the pupils that the great golden ball in the middle of this strange mechanism was the sun—a ball—and that the little ball out from it, which was spinning as it swung around the golden ball, was the earth. The teacher said that the little ball moving around the earth was the moon—the moon which had bothered the lad somewhat because it at times had appeared to be broken. As he watched, the mystery of it transfixed him. It was a miracle! To think that the sun was a great ball of fire and that the earth upon which he lived was not flat but was a ball also and that he did not fall off it but went spinning around the sun was so strange. The many other balls that turned around the sun with the earth hardly meant anything to him. But what he saw was enough.

It is in this way that one of the world's great astronomers describes the experience which led him to become a "searcher of the skies."

What he did not know as he sat in the sixth grade room was that he had just experienced an *adventure in ideas*. He had

moved from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican universe. He had experienced one of the great conversions which can come to man. The adventure awakened a spirit in him such as that felt by John Keats, and the lad might have said—

*"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken."*

These were words spoken by John Keats when as a young man of twenty-one he picked up a copy of Chapman's translation of Homer. The magic experience of Keats evoked what has been called the greatest sonnet in English literature. The young Keats lost himself in the wide expanse of Greek thought and made the moment immortal with his sonnet.

Some people are like that. A youth such as Keats looked at a Grecian urn and saw there a whole civilization. A little mechanical solar system, the *Odyssey* of Homer, and a Grecian urn are enough to open up new worlds. Out of such experiences come *adventures in ideas* for some people.

In a way college is like this. When one goes to college he goes into a laboratory where a great scientific experiment is worked before his eyes. He reads a great book such as *The Republic* of Plato or *The Divine Comedy* of Dante, he sees the statue of David by Michelangelo, and he meets Jesus of Nazareth in *The Gospel According to Saint John* and marvels at the mind of Paul of Tarsus as it is revealed in the *Epistle to the Romans*. Truly this is an *adventure in ideas*.

College was meant to be just such an adventure as this. There was an old college professor who said that he could build a great college upon the study of just three books—*The Republic* of Plato, *The Essay on Human Understanding* by John Locke, and *The Gospel According to Saint John*. The greatest ideas in the history of the human mind can be found in those three books. The two greatest colleges which ever existed, The Academy of Plato, and

the Lyceum of Aristotle did not have even this many books. These two schools were built upon *ideas* alone. The three books suggested by the old professor *are* springboards into intellectual adventure.

Young men and women just out of high school are apt to choose their colleges for very foolish reasons. Some go to a college because it has a famous football team—others pick a college because it has magnificent buildings—and there are those who go simply for the social life that they hope to find on the campus. Once students picked their college because of the teachers who taught there and because of the ideas that were taught there. Paul walked from Tarsus down to Jerusalem to sit in the classes of Gamaliel, Thomas Aquinas walked all the way from Southern Italy up to Paris to hear lectures by Albert the Great, and John Calvin plodded from city to city over France to hear one great teacher after another. Once students chose their college because of the *adventure in ideas* which it held for them. *Surely there are such students today.*

Southwestern believes that there are *enough* young men and women who are looking for the intellectual excitement that comes from the search for truth that the College will have the kind of students it can best serve. The teachers at Southwestern are dedicated to this ideal of a college as a community of teachers and students working together. This is the spirit of a small liberal arts college. The teacher and the student can share the *adventure in ideas together.*

Regardless of what you are going to be or do in later life, the thing that really matters when you go to college is to meet with a great teacher or a great book and to encounter ideas that will awaken you. It is in this way alone that you can gain intellectual stature. In a world that is full of ordinary people thinking and doing ordinary things, such an experience will make you an extraordinary individual.



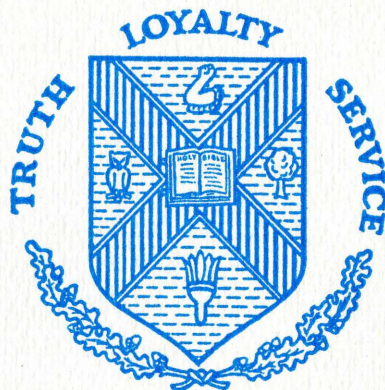
GORDON WHITE HALL

Southwestern is a college interested in working with the young men and women who wish to be extraordinary.

In a century dominated by the idea of the common man, Southwestern is interested in producing “uncommon” men and women—men and women who have had an *adventure in ideas*.

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

—JOHN KEATS



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