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A TOWN
THAT BECAME A
UNIVERSITY

By CORRA HARRIS

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Author of "The Circuit Rider's Wife,"
"My Book and Heart," Etc.

1930

PRIVATELY PRINTED

WINTER PARK
FLORIDA

THERE may be on this continent a village more beautiful than Winter Park but if so I have never seen it. Old Deerfield is lovely but it is dead. Winter Park is alive. Its beauty is that of youth, its spirit looks forward, not backward. It is like a stirring New England community in the time of my boyhood in a setting of everlasting verdure and many flowers and abundant sunlight.

IRVING BACHELLER

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FOREWORD

TOWNS as well as people possess personality. Every city and hamlet expresses the spirit and ideals of the people who founded it, and who make it up. Walt Whitman says:

"The great city is the city that has greatest men and women. If it be but a few ragged huts, it is still the greatest city in the whole world."

In this delightful essay which first appeared in the Jacksonville *Times-Union*, Corra Harris has caught the spirit and personality of one of the most individual communities in the United States. In addition to being the home of Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, has probably the largest winter colony of distinguished literary people in the country. A mere listing of their names would look like a page from a literary "Who's Who."

The cooperative spirit which has always existed between the College and the Community amply justifies Mrs. Harris' happy title, "A Town That Became a University." Among the active cultural organizations are: the Winter Park Symphony Orchestra of fifty-one pieces; the Little Theatre Work Shop, which produces one or more plays each month; the free Tuesday Evening Lectures; Concerts by the Rollins Conservatory of Music; the monthly meetings of the Poetry Society of Florida presided over by Jessie B. Rittenhouse; and the

meetings of the Allied Arts Society of which Irving Bacheller is president.

The latch strings of both the College and the town are always out for those who are attracted by the literary atmosphere and cultural opportunities that belong to this southern "City of Homes," which is set down in the midst of eighteen beautiful lakes and has many miles of splendid streets shaded by moss-grown live oaks that are forever green. Come and see!

EDWIN OSGOOD GROVER

A TOWN THAT BECAME A UNIVERSITY

By CORRA HARRIS



ANOTHER BOOM, EDUCATIONAL this time and as yet no larger than a man's hand, has started in Florida, where the trustees of Rollins College at Winter Park went crazy four years ago and elected Hamilton Holt president of the College.

Winter Park is a wide, winding lovely little old town located in Orange County. It is defined by a necklace of opal lakes instead of the usual dry-land corporation limits. It is shaded by live oaks and camphor trees, and spreads out blooming like a tropical garden in the sun—a rare old narcissus of a town always regarding its green shadows and flame flower spires in the mirrors of the lakes. For fifty years nothing has happened here except the arrival of tourists coming to escape the rigors of their Northern winters. Quiet, prosperous people reefed from the swift currents of their busier years who settled into a sort of warm somnambulance beneath these perpetual summer skies. The parasitic hordes of the late Florida boom passed it by. The hurricane that tore grander places to shreds

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scarcely stirred the green shadows Winter Park cast in the lakes. Rollins College, the oldest college in Florida, and the alma mater of such men as Rex Beach and George E. Merrick, the genius of Coral Gables, stood old and grey upon the shores of one of the lakes, its fortunes fallen, a good old school passing out and by way of being forgotten.

Dr. Holt was first known to the American people as the editor of *The Independent*, but his chief distinction was that of a student of international affairs and a proponent of the League of Nations. Though the vision will never fade out of him, it was too long coming to pass. He was attracted to the idea of becoming president of Rollins College by the fact that he might have the guaranteed opportunity to enforce certain convictions he has about education.

The plans he announced are provocative, and they are particularly opposed to the well known practice of University expansion which confuses greatness with bigness. His idea is to have a limited number of students, seven hundred, to be exact. He wants seventy-five men and women in the faculty, an average of about one teacher for every ten students. Instead of getting professors highly recommended by other professors, he gets the ones most highly recommended *by the students they have taught*. His faculty must be on intimate and sympathetic terms at all

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times with the students. He repudiates the lecture system as a cold, ineffective and impersonal way of relaying knowledge and culture. He is equally opposed to the recitation method and to exchanging a diploma for so many "credits" at the end of a college course. Therefore he requires two-hour periods, not for recitation, but for study, to give every student an opportunity to ask the teacher as many questions as he likes, and a chance to digest the text under the personal guidance of the professor. "The student is the man who comes to learn, therefore he is the one who should ask the questions. The professor is the man who is supposed to know, therefore he is the logical one to answer the student's questions," is the gist of this outrageously convincing theory.

Many a man has talked this way "through his hat," but it takes a simon-pure idealist to prove his contention by practice. Rollins College has already become a laboratory for testing a new and entrancing theory of education. If an individual student fails to fructify normally in knowledge and thinking capacity under this new system he is dropped as an unprofitable investment.

A few Colleges and Universities have limited the number of students they will receive, though the general tendency is toward expansion. Other schools have adopt-

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ed the tutorial system. The peculiar distinction of President Holt's method is the substituting of the professor for the tutor, both as a teacher and companion for the student, during the laboratory experiment of expanding and forming the latter's mind, tastes and character. He is proceeding upon the theory that there would have been no Plato if Plato had received his knowledge of the philosophy of Socrates through a tutor. It was his intimate association with the man Socrates which lifted him and made him the noble interpreter of that great sage. It doth not yet appear how many Platos will graduate from Rollins College. That of course will depend upon the number of Socrates in the faculty. But the plan progresses, and it is not unusual to see the Dean strolling along the lake shore with his students in the late afternoon. A sight, I'll warrant, rarely witnessed about any other educational institution in this country.

Florida has risen in a state of half mystified astonishment to back Hamilton Holt in his plans. Audiences sit as attentive as if they listened to an enthralling adventure when he outlines his plans for a perfect college down to the last detail of the beautiful buildings he wants.

So far so good, and the Doctor going strong! But now in his turn he is being frustrated and confounded by Winter Park.

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The scene is the same—nothing yet has been torn down or built up. The voting strength of the village is the same, about five hundred in case a constable is to be elected. The same green shadows of loveliness glowing beneath the warm, bright skies. But the people have changed. What is all this glad noise about education, this matter of comradeship with good men and great minds and the every day bringing of wise people to town? No milling drudgery to learn, just association! Well, they will have their share in this adventure, whatever it is. Therefore in spite of Dr. Holt's plan to produce a small College with a limited student body, his talk has been too entrancing. Winter Park has become a "University at Large" with all the features of University life for everybody. By entering it you automatically matriculate as a student whether you register in Rollins College, or as a winter colonist at one of the fine hotels, or as a citizen entitled to vote in the next election. You may be called upon to vote yea or nay on the Einstein theory, or on the merits of a hog epic of Chicago written by Carl Sandburg. At the present moment the voting privileges of every man and woman in Winter Park are practically unlimited. Whether he is a millionaire or a poor man he can "make a motion" or express his opinion on the simplest or most

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abstruse subject that pertains to art, culture, philosophy or science. His opportunity for speculating in ideas and ideals is only limited by that little necklace of lakes which may be called the "local water line of culture." Churches, clubs, halls have all become allied departments of Rollins College. Famous men and women are delivering lectures and presiding over discussions in them every day and every evening. A man delivers a lecture on "Ethology" to an attentive audience, thereby discovering for the first time how to put ethics into psychology, which has long been in need of this moral stimulation. People who have never written a line of verse are getting themselves set to a strange rhythm by engaging in a free-for-all friendly altercation concerning modern and classical poetry. Concerts are popular, and nobody cries "This way out in case of Brahms?"

Dancing is popular and ranges all the way from aesthetic and folk dancing to romantic dancing.

There is no theatre of the legitimate stage in town, but they write a play and put it on wherever there is a convenient stage, or they choose a play and produce it with all the courage of professional stars. The town is full of honest-to-goodness stars in the making.

The winter is no longer a dream in the

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sun for the winter colonists here. They are head-over-heels in these enterprises. They only spend their spare time at golf or bridge, and are thoroughly committed to adventures in pure reason, or pure amusement, music or poetry.

In short there are no signs of depression in Winter Park. An idealist has started a boom here which has quickened the minds of men to another vision, freshened their spirits and lifted their hearts. Meanwhile the good Doctor goes his way still intent upon that "Small Cultural College" with seven hundred students, apparently unaware that he has more than twelve hundred already. He has been known to halt in the middle of an address outlining his plans to apologize for the use of the word "perfect," and then seize upon it again to indicate the finished vision of his hopes. And no one knows if it has ever occurred to him that the mere ideal of *perfection* breeds more rapidly than any other in the minds of men. So here is the little summertime town of Winter Park already bred to new life far beyond the campus view of his ideal.

MY FLORIDA

MY FLORIDA! *When from your low-sung stars,
Your murmurous inlets and your tide-
swept bars*

*I take reluctant leave, and in the fading light
My spirit journeys forth upon an unknown flight,*

Think you I shall not seek here to return?

*Yea, I shall strive in humbleness some way to earn
A detail on some duty that shall bear me nigh
Your well-remembered shores; your glorious,
cloud-flecked sky.*

*"Lord," I may reverently say, "this golden street
Is beautiful; the songs the angels sing are sweet.
But, is there not some work that I can do
Down where the gulls cry, over waters blue?"*

*"I would not seem ungrateful, yet I pray,
Let me go on some errand where the spray
Of salt waves leaps and falls around some Key;
If there be work like that, I pray Thee, Lord, send
me."*

STEPHEN COCHRAN SINGLETON