

COLLEGIATE CLAY

By Percy Marks

With a Sketch by Frank Hanley

A FEW years ago the authorities of Dartmouth College made a careful survey of the grades received by its students during the preceding ten years. As a result of that survey, Dartmouth now expects twenty five per cent of its students to receive a grade of A or B, fifty per cent to receive a grade of C, and twenty five per cent to receive a grade of D or E.

What do these figures mean? Well, you can look at them with joy or sorrow, just as you wish. If you are an optimist, you will probably say, "Fine! Seventy five per cent of the students do acceptable work or better." But if you are a pessimist, you will undoubtedly say, "Shades of Socrates! Seventy five per cent of the students do mediocre work or worse."

So far as the intellectual standards and capacities of the undergraduates are concerned, I am a pessimist. To my way of thinking, seventy five per cent of them do mediocre work or worse. I know from long and sad experience just what a C stands for. It stands for work without a scintilla of distinction, for work that is commonplace but fairly accurate, for a conscientious repetition of somebody else's words and ideas. And at Dartmouth College, one quarter of the undergraduates do work that is worse than C, and half of them do work that is no better.

Remember, please, that in using Dartmouth as an example, I am not

using a college with an inferior student body. Dartmouth picks its students with considerable care, and, everything considered, there are probably not half a dozen colleges in the country that have better material from which to pick. Dartmouth certainly belongs to the upper flight of colleges, and while its demands upon its students are not very great, they are excessive in comparison with the demands made by the vast majority of American colleges.

Let me give an example. I know a boy who was dismissed from Dartmouth because of unsatisfactory scholarship. He went next to a middle western college of a thousand students. There he passed all of his courses with satisfactory grades. On the strength of those grades he was admitted to the courses in the Columbia Extension School, where he *repeated* the courses that he had passed in the middle western college — and failed two of them.

What I am getting at is this: the students at Dartmouth College and the standards of Dartmouth College are very superior to the standards and students of most of our colleges; yet, although the standards of Dartmouth are not at all severe, fifty per cent of its students do work that is no better than mediocre, and twenty five per cent do work that is worse than mediocre. You can draw your own conclusions about the work that is being done in the lesser colleges.

The result is, of course, that the intellectual standards of our undergraduates are low — and they are low for the good and simple reason that God did not give even half of the under-

graduates minds capable of understanding or reaching standards that are high. Granted that most of the teaching is bad, granted that some intelligent undergraduates are indolent, the fact still remains that most of the undergraduates were denied at birth the mental strength ever to attain intellectual superiority.

What! did the hand then of the Potter shake? Yes — badly.