

By 1854, however, the students had found a host of substitutes for the old literary societies. The Adelpic Union, the parent society, the name of which the two societies took when acting together, continued to exhibit their accomplished orators and to invite prominent men to address them. In the 1850's their commencement speakers included Rufus Choate, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, Edwin P. Whipple, and Wendell Phillips. The subjects which their members chose for orations and disputes continued to reveal an interest in literature and politics which was not satisfied by the curriculum. Student speakers in 1836 discoursed on "Bulwer and Irving," the British and American authors, and on "Gen. William H. Harrison," the unsuccessful Whig candidate for the presidency that year.<sup>43</sup> In the 1850's their meetings were agitated by timely consideration of slavery, social inequality, and solitary confinement as a method of imprisonment. Except in their libraries, however, the vitality which the societies had once known entered upon a steady and permanent decline throughout the Hopkins era.<sup>44</sup>

With the various local organs of evangelical orthodoxy they had symbolized the extracurricular needs of a simple, country college. They had punctuated a dreary college calendar with debates and orations and lectures. They were, however, inadequate to the needs of the fine gentleman to whose station Williams students increasingly aspired. First secret societies, and then organized athletics, captured the student enthusiasm which once had been devoted almost wholly to Philologian and Philotechnian. At the same time that these new institutions were ministering to the social and physical desires of the Williams undergraduate, new and more satisfactory institutions also appeared to appease his thirst for a kind of knowledge which the college neglected. Only in their libraries were the literary societies relatively unchallenged, either by the college or by new student institutions. For in this area they happily provided tools which served the intellect—which the college would serve only incidentally—and tools which met the demands

43. From a program of the 1836 exhibition; WCL, Scrapbook of Adelpic Union Programs.

44. This decline is reflected in frequent criticisms, reports of lowered attendance at meetings, and the fears of old graduates that the college societies were no longer what they once were. See *Williams Quarterly*, 8 (1861), 192-6, 212; 9 (1862), 292; 15 (1867), 81-2; 15 (1868), 234; *Vidette*, 5 (Mar. 18, 1871), 181, and 6 (Sept. 16, 1871), 2, 3-6. Secret societies, college journalism, and the duties of the curriculum were generally given as reasons for the decline of the literary societies. Similar developments were taking place elsewhere. A Yale student in 1860 attributed their decline in New Haven to class fraternities and other attractions. *University Quarterly*, 1 (1860), 120, 124.