

CONVERSE COLLEGE.

Nolan R. Best in the Interior.

As between the school that clings pertinaciously to the "good old ways," rejecting all else, and the school whose sole glory is its revel of new facts, it would be hard to tell which is less entitled to the praise of friends or wise moderation between these two extremes I know of none which better unites same progressiveness with stable conservatism than the eminently successful Converse College for young women at Spartanburg, S. C. under administration of President R. P. Pell. Dr. Pell is markedly individual among American educators for his apprehension of the breadth and height and depth of the problem of women's education as affecting American society; and year by year, while diligently conserving all that is of worth in conventional methods, he seeks by new steps into broader domains to make the answer of his college more adequate to the greatness of the problem.

In the year just past the most striking advance of the college has been in a matter that might be called simply administrative by the casual observer, but which is valued by President Pell chiefly for its educative influence, although it has incidentally smoothed out many difficult matters in internal college management. The bold plan for students self-government, which was put into experimental effect in the spring of 1905, has now been in perfected operation through the length of a complete school year, and its wisdom has been vindicated in all phases of its results—in improvement of discipline, in development of a keener sense of mutual moral obligation amongst the student body, and in many manifest accretions of strength to individual character. Self-government has been tried of recent years in not a few institutions of learning in this country, but in probably few instances has other faculty had the courage to divest itself of its immediate executive functions as completely as has the faculty at Converse's. Other colleges might well be envious of this precedent if for the benefit of the student body and for the teacher's authority.

SELF-GOVERNMENT.

To participate at Converse's college now is to become a member of the student self-governing association. This association, in perfect freedom and without the slightest attempt on the part of the management to dictate choices, elects officers from the three upper classes. The officers constitute an executive board to which is committed the responsibility for the demeanor of students in all the dormitories of the extensive college buildings. This board prescribes rules for hours of study and hours of social fellowship, and when violations are discovered, it also determines the penalties and enforces them. The administration of regulations in student assembly by the president of the student association is a scene that to many college administrators would appear too amazing to be imagined, but the few times when this has been necessary in the last year at Converse have been very quiet and unimpressive occasions. Without question, on the testimony of the teachers themselves, the effect has been decidedly more profound than was ever produced through reprimands by a college officer "paid to do it."

Should any student feel aggrieved by a judgment of the executive board, it is her constitutional privilege to appeal to the student body at large, which is then summoned to sit as a court. The first summons of that sort at Converse was felt to have brought a crisis in the self-government plan. The young women knew that they were trying themselves and their fit-

ness to carry this responsibility rather than trying the small misdeemeanor of their comrade. The highest judiciary in the land could not have exceeded this gathering of college girls for seriousness. No faculty member was present. The fairest opportunity of defense was given to the appellant, but the board's judgment was overwhelmingly affirmed. The outcome thoroughly established that these young women were capable of making their own rules; of compelling one another, when necessary, to keep the laws of their democracy; and of living together under this regime on such frank terms as forbid prejudice either toward the officers of their mutual organization, who impose the penalties of violated law, or toward these quasi-judges whom the mischief of girlhood sometimes involves in delinquency. A finer discipline in the great fundamental democratic virtue of self-control could not be devised.

THE SENIORS.

The seniors as a body are charged under the plan with a still further responsibility. They are censors of dining-room manners and out-of-door behavior, and in this capacity learn a still deeper lesson of self-control on the eve of active life—the lesson of making themselves examples of the principles which they are expected to inculcate.

In no other particular has the operation of this new system had a happier effect than in the emancipation of the teachers. They are no longer charged with any duty of espionage even when they live in rooms opening off the student corridors. The student proctors are responsible for whatever may happen amiss, and the teacher need look for nothing nor even see anything. There is therefore no occasion for student evasiveness and my mystification in presence of a teacher, and the natural result is that where formal relations aggressive and defensive are abolished, there spontaneously spring up the most beautiful confidential relations of friendship. The teachers have an opportunity, impossible before, of noting down into the innermost secrets of selfish hearts, and the influence which not only gives new power to personal influence, but brings about almost automatically a more individual application of teaching methods. The position of Mrs. Howard, the faculty adviser, is particularly strengthened. No longer is she compelled to be the grim judge of demerits, and her young charges come to her for advice now with a filial freedom which they could not feel when she was a judicial oracle. The mutual confidence of confidences between the dean and the students has been very noteworthy since Mrs. Howard's task was thus simplified. Another characteristic of unique progress at Converse has been the development of a very practical protest against the prevalent habit of teaching music and painting in girls' colleges as if with the intent to make every girl an artist. Nobody supposes that the literary courses in colleges are solely or even primarily for the training of writers; the conscious educational purpose is the culture of a taste capable of appreciating what great writers have already written. It seems strange that the clear analogy has so far been scarcely applied by teachers in the fine arts. Everybody in those lines persists in working for skill, at the piano or with the brush, as the desideratum to be secured by the education of their students. Success for schools of both kinds and ranking is measured wholly in public estimation and in numerical number of graduates of high executive talent which they turn out. It would seem that it should have occurred to all of them long since that by that criterion they are sad failures, for artists to this day remain few compared with those that study art.

THE EYE AND THE EAR.

But Converse holds to the much wiser idea that, at least in a college, which should be a school not of specialism but of general culture, the first use of music and art instruction is to develop not the skilled hand but the appreciative eye and ear. Both Professor Manchester at the head of the music department and Mrs. Kimball at the head of the art department are thoroughly imbued with this conception of college duty, and it is their pride, not so much to have given a few exceptional young women an introduction to careers, as to have afforded to a multitude of average young women the joy of opened senses toward the masterpieces of all time. It is the music department which is far the more elaborately organized, of course, occupying a spacious building devoted entirely to its use, but all the teachers are chosen for their sympathy with this ideal. John C. Alden, the chief teacher of piano, is a most consistent exemplar of cultural teaching, and Professor Manchester pursues the same policy devotedly through his elaborate course of lectures on musical theory, musical history, and musical appreciation—which many widely famed conservatories of music have never thought of duplicating even to this day.

THE MUSIC FESTIVAL.

It is for this reason that the remarkable Music Festival held in the college auditorium at Spartanburg every spring is so highly valued as an adjunct to the college. To the public at large throughout all the southern states it is an occasion of growing importance and meets with continually larger appreciation; the attendance this spring was greater and from a wider area through the South than ever before. But for the college it means particularly the education of hearing the most notable artists of the times. It means for the young women the opportunity for that appreciation to which Professor Manchester is always seeking to lead them. A writer's residence in a great city could scarcely bring better contact with real musical art than is opened to a girl at Converse with one festival season.

But Converse's College is not being exuberant to the musical and artistic side, President Pell takes similar care for inspiration in the highest principles of living. Every commencement season is made rich with great messages from men of great life. At the recent close of the school year the baccalaureate sermon was

preached by Dr. Dargan of Louisville, and the commencement oration was delivered by Dr. Hillis, of Brooklyn—both splendid pictures of the nobler paths of love and duty. The address of Dr. Hillis in particular made a profound impression upon the young women, as he dealt with the pure ideal that John Ruskin entertained of the finest womanhood. It is the intention of the president to continue to improve commencement occasions in this way, and keep them upon as high a plane of oratorical and moral power as was reached in commencement week of 1906.

THE STANDARD.

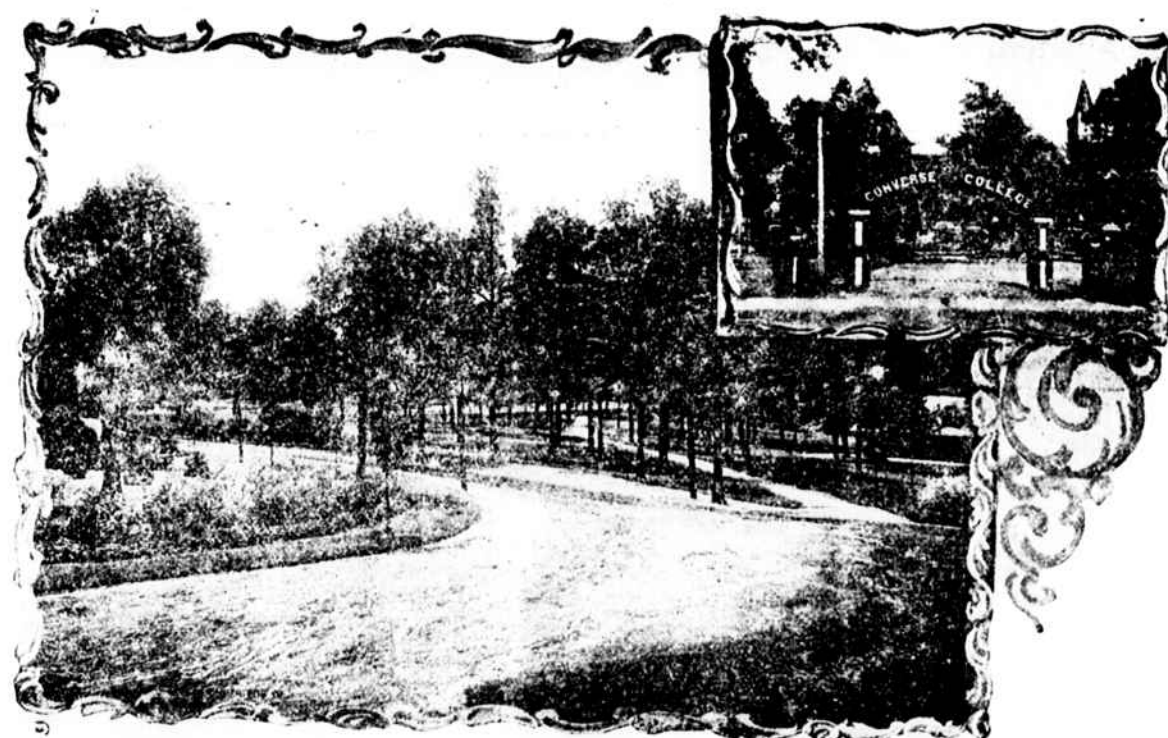
It is greatly to the credit of Converse College that it is continually raising its academic standard. No radical and sudden revision of the curriculum has been attempted, but each year something is taken from the first year of the course and something added to the last year, so that a decided step upward is taken. It is only the standard of the high schools in the South which has kept down the standard of Converse below full college grade; until now, the trustees feel that the college must not be lifted out of touch with the fitting schools surrounding it. But as high school curriculums are now being so rapidly elaborated everywhere in southern states, it will soon be possible for Converse to put its four years on a

seems to have come at the time of their absence from home at college. The peculiar home ties that associated them with the church schools of their native towns were broken at that time, and the college did nothing to interest them in the large proportions of the problem of popular religious education. This fault of the college, therefore, President Pell would correct by establishing religious pedagogy as one of the principal interests of the curriculum. He believes he can send young women back to their home churches eager to teach Sunday schools—eager to put into practice what they have learned in theory from their alma mater.

Certainly it should not be hard to find Christian money by which realization can be given soon to so practical and happy a thought as this.



Mrs. H. T. Converse's Residence.



CONVERSE COLLEGE CAMPUS.

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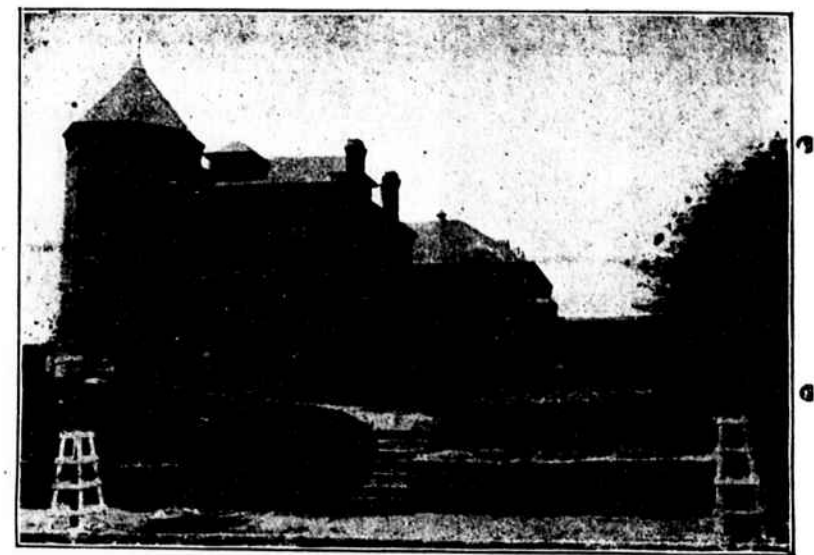
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Bishop W. W. Duncan's Residence.



J. T. Lester's Residence.



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