Where College Boys Prefer Study to Baseball

Reed College of Portland, Oregon, Now in Its Sixth Year, Has Emerged Successfully from Unique Experiment in Education

LAST June saw the completion of the fifth college year and the graduation of the second class by Reed College of Portland, Oregon, an institution which deserves, if any college deserves it, the much misapplied adjective unique. There are many peculiarities about Reed College, or things the conventional educator and the boy who is conventionally educated would regard as peculiarities, but it is the combination of these that makes something rather than any single one that makes the college distinctive.

Reed College is located in the heart of the old college town and universities in the United States are dedicated, theoretically, to the proposition that intellectual progress and the creation or fostering of an enthusiasm for the intellectual life are the prime purpose of an institution of learning. Many colleges, to promote this or for other reasons, have abolished fraternities, or done away with intercollegiate athletics. Several colleges have rigorous requirements for admission, depending more on estimates of the personal character and ability of the candidate than on examinations or certificates. At least one, besides Reed, requires a thesis embodying original research from candidates for the bachelor's degree. Certainly the emphasis on preparing the student for graduate work.

Many colleges have fairly complete honor systems, and a variety of forms of student self-government. Not a few small colleges attempt to discard the traditional instruction with the object of finally admitting only those whose determined and education has adopted the terminology of the Simplified Spelling Board. Many have done their best to be of great service to the communities in which they are situated.

In some of these particulars is Reed College unique, but it does seem to be unique in the spirit which is apparently in some cases a curse but in others an effect of the factors recorded above, and in the way in which the President, in making scholarship not only respectable but necessary, and, as a rule, not only necessary but attractive, is no easy task. For, as William D. Waller, President of English and Argumentation, in Bowdoin College, was elected President of Reed, with power to invent a college spirit and create traditions from the ground up; and after two years is that college has already a solid record of achievement and has developed, if not of the whole thing, in all appears to be an alien who studies it only from the publications are written in English, and the reading zeal for simplified spelling, for instance, appears to be quite as characteristic an element as the general interest in practical sociology.

Reed College comes from the bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Simon O. Reed, who left a sum never officially stated, but estimated unofficially at $1,000,000, for a nonsectarian institution of learning in Portland "having for its object the increase and diffusion of practical knowledge among the citizens of said city, and the promotion of literature, science, and art." The result of the Reed Institute, for which plans for the possible establishment of professional and graduate schools, but which for the present, on the recommendation of Dr. Walker M. Haring, Secretary of the General Education Board, whose educational needs of Portland and vicinity, confine itself to a college of liberal arts. An account of the purpose with which the college was founded and of some of the methods taken to obtain a suitable student body for the development of the Reed College spirit has been written at the request of The Times by President Perley.

"Two years ago this summer," he writes, "while I was at Bowdoin College, in Maine, I received a telegram asking me whether I would go at once to the Pacific Coast to consider the problem of building a college from the ground up. That was my first knowledge of a unique enterprise. About a week later, in Portland, Ore., I had a conference with the President of an endowment of the value of about $1,000,000, left by Mr. and Mrs. Simon O. Reed for the purpose of establishing an educational institution in the City of Portland. There were virtually no other restrictions. The Trustees had decided to establish a college of liberal arts, and had accepted a gift of forty acres, a part of the City of Portland for a campus. No other decisions had been made. The Trustees invited me to become the President of a college with no building, no equipment, no Faculty, no plans. Forty acres of pasture land and an endowment—that was all there was of Reed College at that time.

The chief and by far the most important problem was one of aim. What should an institution, established under these extraordinary, conditions, strive to become? In what ways should it take advantage of its freedom from tradition? It was, as President Jordan said at that time, the only college that had made no mistakes, the only college that had no alumni of which it might be ashamed. In all parts of the country were college, several hundred of them, which would gladly make radical changes were it not for the pressure of their own history. Tradition are hard to cope with, especially when they are defended by an array of graduates who seem to feel that their chief business is to keep the college exactly as it was in the halcyon days of their youth.

"I decided at the outset to visit as many as possible of these colleges and to find out what their students thought they would like to make them if they could begin all over in a clear field. For these purposes of the study, therefore, I visited at least half a dozen colleges and universities, east of the Mississippi, and at least as many west of the Missouri. Everywhere I endeavored to make a judgment from evidence obtained at first hand of the reasons for the prevailing discipline with the American college.

"It seems that there has been such unrest among institutions of higher learning. Boards of committees of trustees, and of faculties, and of alumni, and of Legislatures are addressing themselves, as never before to the problems of the college, trying to determine the grounds for the change of many business men and of some college men that the American college was the most gigantic failure in all our educational history.

"Out of all this criticism and investigation the conviction became general among critical students of the American colleges, including most of the college faculties, that there was little ground, intellectual enthusiasm among students, that the amount of study was disproportionately small, and that the constantly increasing system of academic apparatus, drawn mainly by the professors, themselves, were tending to make the most serious, central purposes of the curriculum
New York Times

choice of a vocation, and the relation of the college to the community. By mean of this, and by every other means the students and teachers endeavor to concentrate their efforts upon their common purposes, and thus to be in reality "Communed of The Quest." This is a view of Reed as it looks from the inside. It may be permitted to add a few points that seem noteworthy to the outsider who studies The Reed College Record, the official publication, and The Quest, the student weekly.

There is nothing particularly revolutionary in the Reed curricula, it is in substance that of the average American college. About 20 per cent of the student's work must be in his major subject, but the remainder leaves a wide freedom of election. Quality of work as well as quantity is counted toward the degree given for the work done according to a reasonable something called the "normal probability curve," which attempts to furnish a scientific rather than a personal basis for grading and thesis for undergraduate are not unknown elsewhere, but the real examination on an entire subject is something almost unheard of in American colleges, where a student, having passed in certain courses, may, in the first or second term of his college courses, can proceed to forget about them with the comfortable certainties that one will ever again inquire into how much he remembers.

President Foster has said that Reed College "specializes in the humanities," but it is notable that the college has thrown itself into the currents of life that are felt so strongly. One of the real and steadfast traditions would grow poorly speedy, they would have been helpful, later, during the first year of instruction, by addressing our community. This is not a sudden awakening, nor are we far from the Quest.' In all of our case, some mistakes are made. Not all our students have impersonating necessities to study philosophy, and it is true that place other interests first and who fail to pay the full respect to every serious problems to pursue them the love of the pursuit, without the prodding of a teacher. Some students feel so out of place that they become part of the Quest.

A number of visitors to the college, a year or two ago, were interested in finding that virtually the entire Faculty in Seattle attending the three-day convention of the Scientific Societies of the Pacific Northwest, that of the Faculty the students had entire charge of the institution, including the conduct of all the classes and laboratories and of the administrative offices. The fact that students are enabled and able to do this is not remarkable. Almost any body of students would be interested in such an adventure as a dramatic "vive." If there is any significance in the incident, it is that everybody took it as a matter of course. It is, as Professor Foster says, in part of either Faculty or students and caused little comment inside the college.

There is no "honor system" devised to cover certain hours and certain exceptions for the students, nor is there a pledge; there is a principle of honor which is regarded as enough to cover the student's entire record. The three or four cases which have occurred in the last five years of the life of the college have been dealt with entirely by the Student Council, which is the governing body of the institution.

The men who only students should be admitted who are consciously qualified to profit by membership in an institution of this kind. There is abundant evidence that the truth of this is not to be overestimated.

For the purpose of making co-workers of the students as quietly as possible, they are left with the sins of the college, and particularly with the specific spirit of the college. The students have been treated as constituents rather than as constituents, but the chief test is one in a sense of institutional interests, and not the obligations of the teachers, students, employees, and other persons who are asked to write letters about the school that they have read. The following is a letter from a teacher of Reed college; such letters are sometimes of great value, sometimes useless. The pur-

Chairman and on which students and Faculty served—are two of the activities whose results have been published by the college.

Last year Reed had 295 students—somewhat more than half of them were women—and the majority of them came from Portland. This is natural in a very young college, situated in a large city, and competing with established institu-

It seems to me that if (faucets, and not all the faucets could be discovered at the one setting, so that when new ones come into the new college, we might reason-
ably hope to get together a group of teachers who will be interested in intellectual activities with spontaneous delight, and, as a rule, leave all other interests and pursuits behind them.

It is judged rightly from my observa-

Published: April 15, 1917
Copyright © The New York Times

No one, I think, sequined with the institution and with others is inclined to quibble about the seriousness and persistent and serious study at Reed College. The students have had the intellectual interests been obliged to compete with the distractions that come more from the more expensive and exciting social and athletic functions. It is this because those who believe that Reed College is missing something that other colleges have. The reason is that there are some who believe that the intellectual interests are the only people are ready to admit that the administration of Reed College has gained a large measure of intellectual control over the life of the college for which the sacrifice of certain aspects of college life were deliberately made at the beginning.

Such results as have been attained however, have not been with an unen-

lected body of students. When we con- sider the tremendous pressure exerted on all of us to make every college as much alike as if we were a part of the same human organism, honest, thorough, hard work; to concen-

trate attention on the serious, central purposes, which are the most compelling of all interests, and control those tending interests of institutions of higher learning; to get what is possible, and not what is merely convenient, and for light, and for the discovery and intensification of human interests. No one thinks of college for a matter of course, to eliminate the great- est distortions of college life and other
colleges.

Reed College aims for its students and Faculty to sustain intellectual enthu- siastic in a homogeneous group, to which none is admitted, and which combined by mistake is tolerated long, who is incapable of serious work, who is not interested in the course of study, whose character and work are honestly, thoroughly, hard work; to concen-

trate attention on the serious, central purposes, which are the most compelling of all interests, and control those tending interests of institutions of higher learning; to get what is possible, and not what is merely convenient, and for light, and for the discovery and intensification of human interests. No one thinks of college for a matter of course, to eliminate the great-

est distortions of college life and other
colleges.

Reed College aims for its students and Faculty to sustain intellectual enthu-

siasm in a homogeneous group, to which none is admitted, and which combined by mistake is tolerated long, who is incapable of serious work, who is not interested in the course of study, whose character and work are honestly, thoroughly, hard work; to concent-

rate attention on the serious, central purposes, which are the most compelling of all interests, and control those tending interests of institutions of higher learning; to get what is possible, and not what is merely convenient, and for light, and for the discovery and intensification of human interests. No one thinks of college for a matter of course, to eliminate the great-

est distortions of college life and other
colleges.