

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



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REED COLLEGE STUDENTS AT VOLUNTEER LABOR.

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

Practically all of the six hundred odd colleges 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 irregular 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 the results of original research from candidates for the baccalaureate degree, instead of reserving this for purely graduate work.

Many colleges have fairly complete honor systems, and various forms of student self-government. Not a few small colleges attempt to discourage applicants for admission with the object of finally admitting only those whose determination to pursue the things best attainable at that particular college persists through many trials. A number of institutions have adopted the orthography of the Simplified Spelling Board. Many have done their best to be of practical service to the communities in which they are situated.

In none of these particulars is Reed College unique, but it does seem to be unique in the spirit which is apparently in some cases a cause and in others an effect of the factors recorded above, and which has resulted, in the words of the President, "in making scholarship not only respectable but necessary, and, as a rule, not only necessary but attractive." It is only six years since Dr. William Trufant Foster, then Professor 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 five years Reed College has already a solid record of achievement and has developed as well a college life in whose flavor, as it appears to an alien who studies it only from the publications of the college or the students, the crusading zeal for simplified spelling, for



STUDENTS KEEPING REED COLLEGE GROUNDS IN TRIM.

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. Simeon G. Reed, who left a sum never officially stated, but estimated unofficially at \$3,000,000, 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 was the Reed Institute, which plans for the possible establishment later of professional and graduate schools, but which for the present, on the recommendation of Dr. Wallace Buttrick, Secretary of the General Education Board, who studied the educational needs of Portland and vicinity, confines 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 Foster.

"Six 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 Trustees of an endowment of the value

of about \$3,000,000, left by Mr. and Mrs. Simeon G. 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 within 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 buildings, no equipment, no Faculty, no students, no history, no traditions, 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 traditions? 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 colleges, several hundred of them, which would gladly make radical changes were it not for the pressure of their own history. Traditions are hard to cope with, especially when they are defended by an army 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 most venturesome thinkers would like to make of them if they could begin all over in a clear field. For the purposes of this study, therefore, I visited at least half a hundred colleges and universities east of the Mississippi and at least as many more west of the Mississippi. Everywhere I endeavored to make a judgment from evidence gained at first hand of the causes for the prevailing discontent with the American college.

"For it seems that never had there been such unrest among institutions of higher learning. Scores of committees of trustees, and of faculties, and of alumni, and of Legislatures were addressing themselves as never before to the problems of the college, trying to determine the grounds for the charge 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 careful students of the American college, including most of the college Faculties, that there was little genuine, intellectual enthusiasm among students, that the amount of study was discreditably small, and that the constantly increasing confusion of incidental amusements, conducted mainly by the students themselves, was tending to make the old, serious, central purposes of the curricula

lum of minor interest to the student body.

"It seemed to me, therefore, that I could probably perform no greater service for the educational world than to use the endowment provided by the Reed family in an attempt to establish a college in which intellectual enthusiasm should be dominant. It seemed to me that if the factors antagonistic to this ideal in other colleges could be discovered at the outset, and not allowed to force their way into the new college, we might reasonably hope to get together a group of teachers and students who would engage in intellectual activities with spontaneous delight and, as a rule, leave all other interests in necessarily subordinate places.

"If I judged rightly from my observations at colleges in all parts of the country, it was the almost unanimous judgment of those who were striving to make scholarship respectable that nothing interfered more with their efforts than the extreme devotion to intercollegiate athletics and social affairs. The first step, therefore, in founding a new college appeared to be the uncompromising elimination of intercollegiate games and fraternities and sororities. The experiment of getting along without these adjuncts of college life, and all that goes with them, Reed College has now tried for five years. It is worthy of note—indeed it must seem extraordinary to most people—that the Faculty of the college previously familiar with forty colleges in which intercollegiate athletics and fraternities played important parts, are virtually, if not quite, unanimous in their conviction that the experiment has been successful.

"No one, I think, acquainted with this institution and with others is inclined to question the fact that there is far more persistent and serious study at Reed College today than would have been possible had intellectual interests been obliged to compete with the distractions that commonly accompany the highly organized and expensive athletic and social functions of American colleges. There are those who believe that Reed College is missing something that other colleges have because of these outside activities, and there are a few who believe that the loss is serious. But even these people are ready to admit that the college has gained a large measure of intellectual enthusiasm among its students for which the sacrifices of certain aspects of college life were deliberately made at the outset.

"Such results as have been attained, however, have not been with an unselected body of students. When we consider the tremendous pressure exerted on all sides to make every college in America exactly like every other college, we can hardly expect an extraordinary experiment to succeed in its early years with ordinary material.

"Reed College aims for its students and Faculty to sustain intellectual enthusiasm in a homogeneous group, to which none is admitted, and in which none admitted by mistake is tolerated long, who is incapable of or unwilling to perform honest, thorough, hard work; to concentrate attention on the serious, central purposes which were formerly the controlling interests of institutions of higher learning; to provide every possible incentive, moral and religious, for right living and for the discovery and intensification of large life purposes; and, therefore, as a matter of course, to eliminate the greatest distractions of college life and subordinate others to the dominant ideals of the institution.

"This aim demands that only students should be admitted who are conspicuously qualified to profit by membership in an institution so conceived and so dedicated. There is abundant evidence that the traditional methods of examination and certification neither open the gates to those best fitted for such a college nor keep out those who are unfit. In judging a candidate for admission to Reed College, formal certificates and examinations are used as contributory evidence, but the chief test is one or more personal interviews with the applicant, supplemented by talks with parents, teachers, employers, and with students already admitted. Other persons are asked to write letters about the candidate after they have read statements concerning the aims of the college; such letters are sometimes of great value, sometimes useless. The purpose is to determine through every available source of information—especially

through physical examinations and personal interviews—whether the student has physical health, intellectual interest, capacity for hard work, earnestness and definiteness of purpose, and personal habits consistent with the attainment of his ambitions.

"The college endeavors to make entrance easy for the strong man whose conventional preparation is irregular, and impossible for the weakling who has merely 'got by,' or who has been pulled through the conventional kind of preparation for college. High school graduation, whether or not from a so-called college preparatory course, is not regarded as evidence of fitness for college." The college catalogue states that the equivalent of a high school course is "the indispensable minimum, but not a guarantee of admission. The college does not require that this work be done in the conventional time or manner, and there is no minimum age for entrance."

"In pursuance of this policy, and in the effort to prepare at once for right traditions, the 263 applicants who appeared before buildings were constructed were considered with great care. Only fifty of these were admitted to the first class; and to guard against importing traditions from other colleges and universities, no students were admitted to advanced standing." (Such students are now admitted on presentation of satisfactory credentials.)

"By the methods described I endeavored to select those who were likely to become intelligent and enthusiastic co-workers in building the new type of college I had at heart. Coworkers—that was the great need. Without the cooperation of the students as a whole, traditions would go wrong speedily. One of the Faculty expressed the idea later, during the first year of instruction, by addressing our community, teachers and students, as 'Comrades of the Quest.'

"In spite of all our care, some mistakes are made. Not all our students have impelling incentives to study provided by themselves; but those few who place other interests first and who fail to become sufficiently interested in any serious problems to pursue them for the love of the pursuit, without the prodding of teachers or the hope of credits, soon feel so out of place that they become dissatisfied with the college.

"A number of visitors to the college, a year or two ago, were interested to find that virtually the entire Faculty were in Seattle attending the three-day convention of the Scientific Societies of the Pacific Coast. During this absence 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 the students were willing and able to do this is not remarkable. Almost any body of students would be interested in such an adventure as a dramatic 'stunt.' If there is any significance in the incident, it is that everybody took it as a matter of course. It involved no change of attitude on the 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 exercises, for which the student has signed a pledge; there is a principle of honor which is regarded as sufficient to cover all phases of student life at all times. The three or four cases which have arisen under the honor principle during the five years of the life of the college have been dealt with entirely by the Student Council.

"For the purpose of making co-workers of the students as quickly as possible and acquainting them with the aims of the college, and particularly with the specific reasons why the college has rejected some honored traditions and established others, a course of study is offered by the President to all freshmen in their first semester. The course deals with concrete problems of college life, because it seems clear that the attitude and habits of college students which are antagonistic to intellectual achievement are partly due to ignorance and lack of timely, specific guidance.

"Among the topics discussed are the following: The history of the American college, the purpose of the college, the offerings of the curriculum, election of courses, methods of study, the use of the library, honor among students, mental recreation, physical health, athletics, social affairs, fraternities, co-education, student government, college chapel, the

choice of a vocation, and the relation of the college to the community. By means of this course, and by every other means, the students and teachers endeavor to concentrate their efforts upon their common purposes, and thus to become in reality 'Comrades 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 curriculum; it is in substance that of the average small college. About 30 per cent. of the student's work must be in his major subject, but the residue leaves a wide freedom of election. Quality of work as well as quantity is counted toward the degree, and credit is given for the work done according to a recondite something called the "normal probability curve," which attempts to furnish a scientific rather than a personal basis for grading. Seminar and thesis for undergraduates are not unknown elsewhere, but the oral examination on an entire subject is something almost unheard of in American colleges, where a student, having passed in certain courses in, say, the first or second term of his college course, can proceed to forget about them with the comfortable certainty that no 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 about it and made itself a community force to a degree which has rarely been attained by more utilitarian institutions.

In a dozen ways the college has become an active factor in the life of the city and the Northwest. A fish experiment station, built on the campus by the State Fish and Game Commission, is advertised in the catalogue as "offering advanced students of biology an opportunity to come into intimate contact with one of the chief industries of the State." What effect Reed College biologists have had on Oregon fish culture is not stated in any publication at hand, but Reed College sociologists seem to be preternaturally active. A study of unemployment in Portland conducted by the teachers and students of sociology, a survey of the problems connected with vaudeville and moving picture theatres by a city committee of which President Foster was

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

Last year Reed had 252 students—somewhat more than half of them women—and the majority of these came from Portland. This is natural in a very young college, situated in a large city, and competing with established institutions. Of more importance is the fact that the percentage of students living outside of Portland was considerably larger in the freshman class than in the senior—that is, Reed attracts more students from a distance each year than in the year preceding. So far practically all of them come from the Pacific Northwest, but there is every reason to expect that as the college becomes more widely known its student body will entirely transcend sectional limits.

As to what the students think of the college, how the somewhat ascetic-sounding program of the college works out in practice, some idea can be gained from a study of The Reed College Quest, the student weekly. And the first effect of a perusal of several numbers of The Quest is to dispose of at least one notion that the stranger, knowing Reed only from its ideals, would be likely to gain. He would be apt to think that a college where everybody is not only expected but required to be a devotee of the cult of learning, where knowledge is pursued with apparently a religious enthusiasm, where the attractions of fraternities and intercollegiate athletics have been deliberately sacrificed to this ideal, would attract only students of the type which is interested in scholarship, and in nothing else.

So it is with pleased surprise that a reader of The Quest discovers that a Reed student, like any other student, is human. The front page of a specimen issue of The Quest tells of the nominations for next year's Student Council; the results of interclass baseball games, the Drama Club's production of "Twelfth Night," a visit of girl students of the physical education department of another college, the visit of several Reed professors to a teachers' association, the all-star selections from the girls' class basketball teams, the chorus rehearsals for the Easter music festival, the winning of a graduate fellowship at Princeton by a last year's alumnus, and the preparations for the Junior prom! It sounds like any other college.