

THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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EDUCATIONAL COMMENT

GREATER FREEDOM FOR SUPERIOR STUDENTS

Brightest students in girls' college relieved of class tedium

SMITH COLLEGE, one of the leading girl's colleges in the east, has made a radical change in its curriculum this semester in so far as that little group of intellectuals—those who have an average at the end of their second year of B or better—are concerned. Instead of having to attend classes and take examinations with the more backward girls, the star students may, if they desire, devote all their time and thought in their special field, under the guidance of a general director.

The plan is wholly optional, and any student, however, brilliant, who wishes to follow the regular course of study may do so and may obtain general honors as heretofore. At Smith these students will have to take a wide range of prescribed courses in their first two years, in this way differing from the honor schools of the English universities. It differs also from the tutorial system adopted in recent years in some American universities in its restriction of the system of individual guidance to a small picked group, thus avoiding the danger of bankruptcy, which, according to the announcement of the plan in school life, "is apt to accompany the application of costly methods to the whole body of students."

"The rate of progress aimed at in college courses is determined by a rough averaging of the capacity of all the students in them,"

the announcement states, "with the result that while this rate is barely maintained by the weakest students, it is very far from keeping the ablest employed. These latter, the most valuable assets of the college and of the country, are liable either to fall into habits of intellectual loafing or to occupy their too abundant leisure by a disproportionate amount of non-academic activities.

"The objection to assuming a uniform pace for all abilities applies also to a uniform method of instruction. Frequent recitations and lectures may be the best means of keeping the weaker students moving; but for the brighter minds they are unnecessary and wasteful. After a good student has acquired habits of study and vital intellectual interests, she needs leisure for thinking and large quantities of solid reading rather than hours a day of class-room work.

"Further, after the large range of subjects required by the curriculum in the first two years, she is ready for a more intensive application in some chosen field, so that at the end of her course she may carry away not merely a great variety of scraps of knowledge but power and method for the mastery of a single department of learning. During the acquisition of this power she should be freed from the constant interruption of tests and examinations and encouraged to take on her own shoulders the chief responsibility for her mental development.

"Recognizing these principles, the faculty has approved a scheme by which at the end of the sophomore year students having an average of B or better—that is, about 10 per cent. of the class—shall be permitted to apply for candidacy for honors in a special field. If approved by the committee in charge and the department of their choice, they will be relieved during the last two years of the routine of class attendance and course examinations. Each candidate will come under the guidance of a general director of her course, who will plan for her a series of units of study, for each semester, and will arrange the supervision of her work in each of these units by a special instructor.

"This supervision will in general be conducted by means of suggested readings, written reports calculated to train judgment as well as the power of collecting and organizing facts, and conferences, weekly or fortnightly,

in which one report is criticised an instruction given for the preparation of the next. The last semester of the senior year will be devoted to the writing of a long paper and to a general review preparatory to an extensive examination covering the whole field of study of the last two years."

ITS BEARING WIDER THAN ECCLESIASTICAL

THERE is much more in Bishop Manning's letter to Dr. Grant than its immediate bearing on the utterances which caused it to be written, according to an editorial opinion of *The New York Times*. It constitutes, too, a lesson, much needed, these days, on the real nature of free speech and the right of everybody, in such a country as this one, to believe what he chooses and to tell the truth as he sees it.

At frequently recurring intervals some clergyman, and even oftener some collegiate professor or instructor, says something or teaches something that grieves or offends those upon whom depends the retention of his place in the church or college. Now and then such a person is dismissed, after a controversy more or less bitter and sensational, and all too often he goes away claiming sympathy as a martyr and the victim of oppression. All too often he gets from people who share his beliefs the sympathy he claims—and not infrequently he is able to capitalize his well advertised woes and to become both more famous and more prosperous than he was before.

In most of these cases, no rights, of free speech or other, have been violated, and there would have been no trouble whatever if the clergyman or professor had done what he should have done and exactly what Bishop Manning tells Dr. Grant he must do—recant or resign. Freedom neither of speech nor of opinion is violated when these alternatives are presented, and he who does not accept and act on one or the other of them has no grievance if effective measures are taken to make him seek other scenes for promulgating doctrines which, with or without reason, are viewed with disfavor by those who have been paying for his services or under whose authority he voluntarily had placed himself.

ADOPT NEW POLICIES

THE State Board of Education during its proceedings this week adopted a policy which may place upon an entirely different plane the problem of school book adoption. Explained in a few words, the policy is this: That because of the development of scientific technique in education, it is now possible to experimentally determine the relative worth of textbooks by their use under standard school room conditions. Such being the case, a small list of textbooks in each subject should first be selected by preliminary examination and test and subsequently tested out in the schools for at least one year prior to the time of adopting textbooks.

In accordance with the detailed plan formulated, during the next year it is planned to test out the elementary spelling book and language and grammar books now on the present list and compare the results with several other texts in these subjects which by careful study have been found to score high in excellence. This report will be made to the State Board of Education for consideration and will be made the basis for determining what changes shall subsequently be made in these subjects.

"POTENTIAL" EXAMINATIONS

PRESIDENT Lowell in his annual report has some interesting comments upon a type of examination now in vogue at Harvard. The ordinary test seeks to discover and appraise the extent to which the student has possessed himself of a knowledge of the specific matters presented in lecture courses and in prescribed textbooks. The new style of examination aims to find out the student's ability to use and apply the knowledge to which the course of study relates. It also apparently tests the student's general acquaintance with a province of scientific inquiry, rather than his familiarity with those particular aspects of it which may have been emphasized in the classroom. This "potential" examination, indicative of the student's power correctly to apply knowledge to concrete situations, must be successfully passed, in addition to the informational tests, as a prerequisite to a degree.

The President of Harvard is aware that the older informational test may, in varying degrees, elicit the ability whose presence or absence is now to be gauged by the "potential" test. Indeed, in the field of mathematics, the solution of problems, provided they are properly framed, will disclose something of this adaptive or practical power—a fact which, doubtless, accounts in part for "the natural man's instinctive aversion to mathematics."

The new plan seems rational and promising. The college student, among other peculiar attributes, is often likely, in a particular subject, to become a victim of "one book." Nor is the failing one that college teachers always escape. During the war a recently appointed instructor in a Government seminary, on first meeting his class, announced that he knew practically nothing of his subject, but promised the class that he would endeavor to be a perfectly fair referee between them and the textbook. Anything that will make for vital knowledge rather than predigested information is in the right direction. It ought to help spread the idea that lecturers and texts are aids to the acquisition of knowledge, not substitutes for the real thing.

REVISION OF HIGH SCHOOL COURSE OF STUDY

THE State Board of Education has authorized the Secondary Education Division of the State Department of Education to undertake a revision of the Courses of Study for High Schools. The courses now in use in the high schools were adopted by the State Board of Education on June 25, 1919, and have been thoroughly tested out in the high schools for four school years. It will be possible, therefore, in revising the courses to eliminate the weaknesses which have become apparent and to make the additions which the experience of the past four years indicates as desirable.

The following committees have been appointed to co-operate with the State Supervisor of Secondary Education in the work of revision:

COMMITTEES

HIGH SCHOOL COURSE OF STUDY REVISION

English: J. M. Grainger, Chairman, S. N. S., Farmville; H. Augustus Miller, Jr., Petersburg H. S.; Conrad T. Logan, S. N. S., Harrisonburg; J. L. Borden, Bedford, H. S.

Mathematics: Fred M. Alexander, Chairman, Newport News H. S. Miss Nellie Smithey, Roanoke H. S.; R. C. Bowton, Supt. of Schools, Clifton Forge.

Science: C. K. Holsinger, Chairman, Lawrenceville H. S.; R. L. Sweeney, Woodrow Wilson H. S., Portsmouth; J. M. Shue, Farmville H. S.

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Latin: Miss Sallie S. Lovelace, Chairman, Roanoke H. S.; H. L. Sulfridge, Big Stone Gap H. S.; Harrington Waddell, Lexington H. S.

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Physical Education: G. C. Throner, Chairman, State Supervisor Physical Education, Richmond; Tucker Jones, William and Mary College, Williamsburg; Harry Baldwin, City Schools, Newport News.

Reviewing Committee: Harris Hart, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Richmond; W. R. Smithey, Professor Secondary Education, University of Virginia; K. J. Hoke, Professor Secondary Education, William and Mary College, Williamsburg; W. T. Sanger, Secretary State Board of Education, Richmond; M. L. Combs, Asst. State Supervisor Secondary Education, Richmond; Henry G. Ellis, State Supervisor Secondary Education, Richmond.

The work of revision has already commenced, and will be completed in time for the new courses to be available for use in the high schools at the beginning of the session of 1923-1924. Persons interested in changes in particular courses will materially contribute to the success of the work by writing to the chairmen of appropriate sub-committees and expressing their views.