

## WHAT EDUCATORS THINK OF AMERICAN COL- LEGE GIRLS

Dr. Charles J. Smith, President of Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, in a speech before the eleventh annual meeting of the National Lutheran Educational Conference in New York City, directed his remarks at the social life of modern young women. Remarks attributed to Dr. Smith he later denied, saying he had not claimed American college girls were given to cigarette smoking, drinking and other bad habits, but that he had referred to "a new type of American woman which has been produced by the present social order."

Such was the interest, nevertheless, aroused over Dr. Smith's remarks that a number of prominent educators were interviewed with regard to existing conditions in leading institutions. Interviews with officers of Vassar College, Barnard College, Mt. Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, and Hunter College were sought by a representative of the *New York Times*; and their comments on the character of the young women in their institutions is presented as of more than passing interest:

### *"Distrust of Youth Ridiculous"*

According to President Henry Noble MacCracken of Vassar College the present profound distrust of youth is ridiculous.

"What we all need is to be infected with youth," said this guardian of eleven hundred and some odd undergraduates. "Then we will understand better what youth is driving at and youth will have more tolerance for what we think and say."

Through the four big windows of the President's office in Vassar's old main building, one caught glimpses of that much discussed "youth" swinging along with uncovered head and book-laden arms. It walked alone and it walked in groups. Sometimes it stopped to exchange greetings and sometimes those greetings were tossed in passing with a wave of the arm and a backward smile. Small chance apparently not to be infected with youth if one stayed long at that old farm of Matthew Vassar's at Poughkeepsie on the Hudson River.

"Youth hasn't been living in a vacuum,"

ruminated the boyish-looking President. "The modern girl sees all of life that she can see. She knows a great deal about her father and mother. More, perhaps, than they know about her. She thinks a great deal about life. The girls who come here are serious about their work. All of them are doing what they want to do most. They make study a major sport. It is the business of the instructors to see that students like this sport best. We can learn a great deal from her, and incidentally we learn something about her.

### *What Vassar Has Learned*

"We've learned that she has a fine mind, that she has originality, that she can apply herself to scholastic work with brilliant results. The debates between Vassar and the men's colleges have proved our girls can compete creditably with undergraduates of Harvard, Yale and Princeton. In the last State medical examination a Vassar graduate stood third, with two Harvard men first and second. Our graduates have many of them taken important positions, some as instructors in colleges, others in equally responsible posts. But I'm boasting," smiled the man who refused to distrust youth and advises those who do to become "infected with it."

"Faculties take themselves too seriously. The members are apt to be pompous, aloof, inaccessible. I am only an older brother to these students. I am not here to criticize. I'm here to help. And the only way to help is to listen to what they have to say. This office is always open to them. They may come here at any time to talk over matters which bother them. Just now there has been a request from the student body for a change in the curriculum. A conference has been arranged between a Faculty committee and a student committee. The change will be made if it is found desirable.

"During the four years a girl is with us we try to give her the necessary equipment for her later life outside of college. If there is a protest against the college environment, she is given an opportunity to voice that protest. But we do not let her burn down a chemical laboratory. We do not give her an uncontrolled environment. We tell the students what control is needed in a laboratory; that if certain precautions are not observed, definite disaster follows. Then we say, 'Go



ahead and learn chemistry.' It is our duty to point out the dangers of the environment in which the girl works and lives. Fire laws must be obeyed or there is a conflagration. Other laws must be obeyed or there is apt to be a catastrophe.

*Stop Criticizing, Says MacCracken*

"Psychology has been showing us the way to solve many difficulties. Within the last ten years, it has given us a much better understanding of things we formerly knew little about. Not only are we learning more about the study capacity of the student, but more about her physical and mental state. There is no use blaming any one when he is sick. And certainly some people are sick. Take the young girl who committed suicide the other day in New York because she was taller than the rest of the class. That girl was sick. She should not be blamed for what she did. Those are things to be guarded against. In most cases they can be prevented. That is the responsibility of the modern school. Statistics show, I think, that 80 percent of the human race are honest; the other 20 percent are victims of social heredity and bad environment.

"The purpose of a college is to catch up with one's own past, including one's self. By this I mean the history of the human race from the beginning and its relation to the present. The process of education is the process of taking advantage of a controlled environment. During the time students are here they are catching up with their environment. They discover this environment for themselves, and they develop a power of selection.

"Let's get down to our jobs. Let's stop criticizing the modern girl. I think one of our teachers hit the nail on the head the other day when she said that the conduct of the observed was apt to be reflected by the mind of the observer."

Dr. MacCracken's only comment on the recent discussion of specific habits of a harmful nature attributed to college girls was that Vassar had declined last year to join a committee of college representatives investigating this matter, as there was no evidence to warrant such action.

*More Self-Reliant Than of Old*

Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard

College remarks that: "It is true that a good many of the younger generation do foolish things at times, but so have they always done in the past. For the young women of the present I have great respect. They seem to me on the whole an admirable lot. Harmful and offensive habits are, I believe, much less prevalent in college than among girls of the same age outside college walls. They are not causing us particular anxiety at Barnard."

Miss M. E. Wooley, President of Mount Holyoke College, does not concede that as a group undergraduates are either superficial or conspicuous.

"I am not at all sure that the college girl of today is to be criticized more than the college girl of yesterday," she says. "Notwithstanding the fact that her sport clothes would have seemed remarkable ten years ago and her manners somewhat frank and outspoken, I find her just as responsive and earnest, perhaps more self-reliant and independent. The colleges naturally are affected by the tone of society outside, and in the large college groups throughout the country there are doubtless small elements of the superficial and conspicuous. I doubt whether in any group of young women it is possible to find so much real earnestness of purpose and high idealism as in the undergraduates in our colleges."

Another Dean of a woman's college, Miss Ada L. Comstock, President of Radcliffe, mentions restlessness alone as a possible danger to the steady development of the modern college girl. She is on the whole, according to Dean Comstock, more intelligent than her mother.

"There is, I believe, only one safe generalization to make about the college girl of today. This is, that she is more numerous than ever before and she represents a greater variety of homes. Consequently, she probably reflects American life more truly than in earlier days when she came from the exceptional home."

*As Seen at Hunter College*

The statement of President George S. Davis, of Hunter College, is of particular interest, coming as it does from the head of a school whose students are not under his jurisdiction after a day's classes are over. Hunter College is not a boarding school.

"In view of the fact that Dr. Smith of



Roanoke College did not say the things attributed to him concerning college girls of today, it seems to me improper and impertinent to discuss the matter in relation to him. He has been very unfortunate in having been the unintentional occasion of statements in the press derogative of college girls, when his strictures of feminine conduct were intended to call public attention to certain social improprieties among young women in general; improprieties which are alleged to be committed by some of them irrespective of their connection with educational institutions. From this point of view I believe that the warning given by Dr. Smith is not without some justification.

"Personally, I do not consider that there is any such person as 'the modern college girl.' The expression implies a type, whereas the girls who go to college are infinite in their variety. They cannot be standardized and labeled in that way and then be subjected to adverse criticisms as a whole because of alleged vagaries in conduct on the part of a very limited number of individuals.

"At Hunter we have never seen any indications of the particular offenses properly condemned by Dr. Smith, and I can assure the public that they have not been committed by our students while under our jurisdiction. After our students leave for the day they are absorbed into the life of the city and behave, as far as I know, after the manner of other girls, but with such self-restraint as their ideals as college girls and their own breeding may impose.

"Hunter girls, as classes and societies, have had many social functions, such as dances, dramatics, etc., in the various hotels and theatres of the city, and we have never had an instance of such offenses as pointed out. I do not wish to imply that Hunter girls are entirely without imperfection, but only that while under the college jurisdiction or patronage they naturally respect the ideals which they themselves have set up. I also believe they respect them at other times, but what they do elsewhere and at other times is a matter for their parents, none of whom have ever complained that their daughters gave them trouble in the ways criticized.

"I have found, in these later days, that when girls enter college a great change takes

place in their attitude toward things. In the first place, there is an increase in dignity from the very fact that they are in college. They are thrown more upon their own resources than formerly, and in consequence they develop a greater sense of responsibility. Their interests become much wider and they obtain a most intelligent understanding of social, political and, to some extent, economic conditions. They form opinions and are able to defend them.

"Comparing, as you suggest, college girls of today with college girls of yesterday, I should say that some of them are better and some of them are worse; but taking them for better or worse, I have found the young college women of the present day quite efficient, very reasonable, and altogether delightful persons to work with and for."

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### INSTITUTIONS FOR THE BLIND

Statistics of sixty-four schools for the blind in 1922, with an enrollment of 4,947 pupils, are reported by the Bureau of Education of the Department of the Interior in a bulletin just issued. Nine other schools are listed in earlier reports, with 655 pupils, making in all 73 schools for the blind in the United States with a total enrollment of 5,602.

Forty-eight of these institutions are State schools, and 13 of the State schools are for both blind and deaf. One public institution is in Porto Rico; 16 are parts of city school systems, and eight are private institutions.

These schools report libraries containing 140,905 books with raised type, and 61,785 printed books. Three institutions say they have no libraries, and four others failed to report on this feature.

The bulletin states that the receipts of 60 schools reporting on the subject from state, county, or city, from private benefactions endowment funds and other sources, were \$3,414,973. The expenditures of the 58 schools which reported on this subject amounted to \$2,664,999 for the fiscal year. These expenditures were for buildings and lasting improvements, teachers, salaries, books, and other current expenses. Fifty-six schools reported property valued at \$5,909,768.