

FACTORS IN THE DORMITORY PROBLEM.

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In solving the problem of the college dormitory the first essential is that the faculty officers in charge shall recognize the educational value of the leisure time of the student. The purpose of a college education is not only to educate the student in formal disciplines, but to aid him in discovering his own powers and to train him in the best use of these powers for effective work in life; in other words, to discover the profession or calling in life for which he is best fitted and to prepare him to be a good citizen. A large part of this most important work is done outside of the classroom and laboratory, during the hours when the student mingles freely with his fellows, expresses himself without restraint and takes on the habit of thought and speech and life of the crowd with which he associates. The education of the classroom may be training in one direction while the education of his chums in the dormitory is training him in an opposite direction. In other words, the first factor in solving the problem is to recognize that for good or evil, success or failure, life in the dormitory is a powerful influence in the life of the student. The strongest lines of social influence are always horizontal. We are more powerfully affected by the opinions of our peers than by those of our superiors. The student will listen with respect to the teaching of the faculty, but he will accurately imitate the language and life of his chums.

Second: The college graduate should be prepared for his duties as a citizen. He gets little training for this in the home where the father acts for the home and its members, and it is possible for a student to go through college, performing his assigned tasks fairly well, with no real sense of responsibility as a member of society. The lawlessness exhibited in hazing, the student pranks that break the municipal law and the general disorder approved by students of good character, is ample evidence that each generation of students needs to be instructed and trained in the duties of citizenship in some definite and concrete way.

Third: It is important to place the management of college dormitories in the hands of some committee or administrative officer of the faculty who does not reside in the house, who will recognize the value of the student's leisure time and the need of training him in the duties of citizenship—one who is both patient and optimistic enough to believe that the dormi-

tory can be used successfully for this kind of training. Faculties have erred on two sides: on the one hand by allowing students to room and board in unorganized boarding-houses without supervision, where there is entirely too much freedom, and on the other hand by attempting to over-govern. The unorganized boarding-house is apt to become merely a place for eating and sleeping, while the dormitory wholly governed by the faculty trains some of its students to blind obedience and tempts others to use their wits in breaking the regulations, often for no other motive than the pleasure of defying authority. Each condition is bad. The kind of man to be put in charge is one who has real faith in the essential goodness of the average student's character and who will allow him the largest amount of freedom, at the same time teaching him self-control and obedience to an authority that he respects.

Fourth: The faculty officer in charge of dormitories must have the rare tact and ability to treat the students as though they were adult gentlemen, at the same time remembering that they will very often act like immature and untrained boys.

Fifth: The best results are obtained by a system of government that gives the individual student a real voice in the control of the house and a sense of responsibility for its good name. The building should be in charge of a competent janitor who will keep it in repair and assess damages for injury by any other member of the house, so that the faculty officer is left free to advise the students in the more important matters. At the opening of the college year, members of each house should be called together for a house meeting. The faculty officer should explain in detail that the members of the house are to govern themselves, that each member is expected to perform his full duty like a gentleman, to do nothing that will interfere with any member of the house or with the house itself, and to do all in his power to promote the interests of his fellow students. In other words, that he is to be a good citizen in this small community. One of the upper classmen is then elected Chairman of the house, by ballot vote. A house committee is similarly elected, one member from each floor. This committee prepares and presents a set of rules for discussion, amendment and adoption by the house, and after adoption these rules are the law for the year, to be executed by the house chairman and his committee, the faculty officer being the advisor. If the faculty officer during the year sees any infraction of the rules, he goes to the student head of the house rather than to the student involved, and governs through him, and if the student head is unable to enforce authority, he freely consults with the faculty officer.

After several years of trial, and freely admitting that no system is perfect, I am convinced that this method of self-government produces the best results. For example, the house rules are as rigid as the faculty would desire to make them. Small infractions of these rules are promptly recognized by some member of the committee while it is confessedly difficult and sometimes impossible for the faculty to gain knowledge of even serious misdemeanors. The students, when left with the government in their own hands, can carry on an investigation, secure evidence and obtain obedience with more promptness and accuracy than can any faculty or administrative officer. This is only a simple application of the principle of trial by a jury of one's peers.

Infractions of the rules are a rare occurrence. The students soon come to recognize the house as their own, that they are living under their own laws and are amenable to their own government. In cases of serious infraction of the rules, their own officers are severe and I have known them to go far enough to recommend expulsion from the house. In cases of this kind it is important that there be free consultation with the faculty officer to prevent hasty and unjust action.

In addition to the fact that this system reduces friction between the faculty and students in the dormitory, it has great value in training students in self government for the duties of citizenship. As one of the student committeemen expressed it when there was a difficult case of discipline on hand: "We are up against the same kind of problems we will have to meet when we get out of college, and we are learning how to solve them."

With us it has been the custom for each dormitory to hold an annual banquet to promote good fellowship, and to emphasize the fact that the house is in reality a large democratic fraternity.

The same system prevails in the women's dormitory, the only difference being that one of the women teachers lives in the house with the title, "Head of the House," and is not only a chaperon, but adviser to the house committee.

Conditions vary in different institutions. With us we find it desirable to have the men and women take their meals together in the Commons. We have found great value in providing a Commons to accommodate about 225 students. Here again the self governing system prevails. The students elect from the senior class the president of their own dining association. This president presides at the head table and arranges for the seating of the students and for the change of sittings at stated periods throughout the year. This orderly seating

and frequent change brings the men and women together, promotes general conversation and trains in proper dining-room manners. The dining association elects the steward, who does the buying, but his bills are audited and paid through the treasurer's office of the college.

It is my opinion that the best results are obtained in both dormitory and Commons where the students are gathered in comparatively small groups, 25 to 50 in the dormitory and 200 in the dining hall, and I would rather provide for four or five hundred students in two separate Commons than to have all in one. When the crowd is too large in either dormitory or Commons the sense of responsibility is weakened. Where the numbers are too small the feeling of democracy and the training for citizenship is lost, as a small crowd becomes too exclusive and self-contained.

To sum up the whole problem, we must recognize the value of the student's leisure time for his education, and must place him on his honor for self-government and self-control, giving him frequent and friendly advice.