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TOPICS OF THE TIME.

College Presidents and the Power of Appointment.

A COLLEGE president is a purely American institution; no officer having the same name or functions is found in European universities. In Germany, a *rector magnificus*, who is the presiding officer in the faculty and the official representative of the university on all public occasions, is elected annually by his colleagues in the academical senate; but he has no control over the latter, nor, in fact, any recognized powers which do not also belong to every other full professor. He is therefore not a president in the American sense, having more limited functions and responsibility. A nearer equivalent to our presidential office is that of the curator of the German university—a resident Government officer, who looks after the financial affairs of the institution, and has a general supervision over all its departments. He has, however, in reality small power, but reports all cases requiring interference to the minister of public instruction and worship *(cultusminister)*, who governs the university through his agency. The curator is, moreover, not a member of the faculty, and has nothing to do with any kind of teaching. He is purely an administrative officer, and exerts his power by means of his influence with the Government, to which he stands approximately in the same relation as an American college president does to the board of trustees. In other respects, however, the differences of the two systems are more striking than their points of resemblance.

Nominally, a college president is usually the representative of the governing body of the institution, and holds office only so long as his administration and general policy are acceptable to the board of trustees. As a matter of fact, however, the president, if he be an able and energetic man, governs the board, which, as a rule, registers his will, appoints his candidates for professorships, and in all except the financial management leaves his hands free. A man with a definite purpose, and the power to defend it, has always an advantage over thirty or forty men with mere general impressions on the subject of education, but with no previous training which enables them to form sound and definite conclusions. In the matter of appointments, the president has again the advantage, in being better able to judge of the standing and scholarly reputation of every applicant in the special departments, and, if he distrusts his own judgment, he knows better where to turn to obtain reliable information; while among the lawyers, merchants, and clergymen constituting the board of trustees, the number is small of those capable of forming an opinion as to the merit of a chemist, physicist, or philologist. It therefore follows that, whenever the trustees undertake to consult their own preferences, disregarding the president's recommendation, they usually make a mistake; and, as every one knows, mistakes in appointments are the most serious ones that the governing boards of educational institutions can make, and are, moreover, very hard to remedy. It is such a common thing, for men who have no special claim to scholarship themselves, to undervalue the difficulties of acquiring it; and in consequence, a very lax notion is apt to prevail that, if the candidate for this or that professorship has hitherto devoted his time to something else, he can easily "catch up" and make himself proficient in a new department, if he only sets earnestly about it. It is this baneful idea which produces so many bad appointments in the faculties of many colleges, and which makes the scholarship of the average college graduate so unsatisfactory as it generally is. The tendency toward specialization in modern life is so great that no man (unless he be a genius of rare caliber) can make himself really prominent in any science or department of knowledge for which he has not trained himself from a comparatively early age by long and serious study; and even a relative proficiency, which would enable him to give elementary instruction, is not acquired by a year of "cramming" or unsystematic preparation, such as a man is forced to adopt who accepts a professorship the requirements of which are beyond his actual attainments at the time of appointment.

We have said that the president of a college is, as a rule, better qualified for the task of selecting a faculty than the trustees in whom the right of appointment is actually vested. But even a president is far from possessing the intellectual equipment necessary for so difficult a task. No one man, however able and learned, can possibly have a sufficient insight into all the branches of knowledge which have to be represented in a college faculty to determine the relative proficiency of the many applicants who present themselves for any vacancy in the body of instructors. If he has made a specialty of philosophy, or philology, or history, he is apt to have but the vaguest notions about the sciences, and is scarcely competent to judge concerning the acquirements of competing scientists. It is in order to supplement this inevitable limitation in the judgment of any individual, however learned, that the German Government, although reserving for itself the final decision, practically vests the power of appointment in the academic senate, of which all the full or ordinary professors of the university are members. When a vacancy occurs, the names of the various candidates are discussed, and specialists in the same department are invited to express their opinions freely. If the decision rested with these specialists, —who may be rivals in the same field and not above a little professional jealousy,—the wisdom of this method might well be questioned; but, in the first place, every branch of knowledge is so numerously represented at a German university, that the jealousy of any one man would have but small influence; and secondly, the faculty at large, and especially the professors of kindred sciences, exercise a wholesome restraint upon any one who would allow personal

feelings to bias his judgment. The generous rivalry between the various German universities makes every academic senate anxious to strengthen itself by the acquisition of the most distinguished names in every science, because the reputation of the university, by which alone students are attracted, depends solely upon this one consideration—the strength of its faculty. It is a very frequent occurrence that a single man of great repute brings a sudden rush of students to a comparatively obscure university; and as these students must pursue several studies, and pay direct fees to the professors whose lectures they attend, it is obvious that all are benefited by the distinction of a new colleague. It may therefore be asserted that the general sense of any considerable body of scholars in a question of appointment, after a free discussion, is apt to be as near an approximation toward the absolute right as we can ever hope to arrive at. The German Government, at all events, recognizes this fact, first, in its consultation of the academical senate; and secondly, in its acceptance of its preference. The custom is for the senate to send to the minister of public instruction three names, accompanying each with a recommendation specifying the qualifications of each nominee for the office. The rector also, in behalf of the senate, respectfully indicates who is its first choice, and as a rule the Government acts upon this advice. There is no law binding the minister in this matter, but practically a well-established precedent is as good as a law.

In France, where much more laxness and favoritism prevail in state appointments, a similar system is now in vogue. If a vacancy occurs in the Collége de France, the Government refers the names of all the candidates to the class in L'Institut de France comprising the specialists in this or that particular science. A graduated list is also prepared by the faculty of the college, and if its recommendation coincides with that of the Institute, the appointment is forthwith made; in case of a divergence of views, tradition limits the minister to a choice between the two or three candidates who have been placed among the first upon the lists of the two learned bodies. This method has resulted in bringing together in the faculty of the Collége de France unquestionably the most eminent scientists and scholars whom the country possesses; and it is the general opinion, among men who are competent to judge, that the classes in the Institute as well as the faculty of the college have fulfilled their function admirably, and have usually named the worthiest candidate.

The conclusion deducible from the experience both of Germany and France thus points in the same direction, viz.: nomination of professors, not by a board of business men, but by a board of scholars. This plan was long ago adopted at Yale, but, so far as we know, has not had a fair trial in any other American university. And yet the faculties of the larger American colleges comprise many distinguished scholars, whose vote for a new colleague would certainly be more weighty and more intelligent than that of an equal number of clergymen, lawyers, and retired millionaires. Would any one contend that the collective faculty of Harvard College would not be more competent to judge of the relative qualifications of a dozen candidates for a professorship than the corporation, assisted by President Eliot? What the corporation, in nine cases out of ten, would probably do, would be to register its approval of the president's choice; and that a president, be he never so able, cannot in every instance be equally competent to choose, we have already shown. The experiment is therefore worthy of a more general trial, to give the faculty the right of nomination, while the board of trustees might still retain the right of appointment. As matters now stand, there may be good reason to fear that the latter (priding themselves on their practical sense and crediting the faculty with a slight deficiency in this direction) would not duly heed the recommendations of the former. But some weight the faculty's nomination would certainly carry, especially when accompanied by explicit reasons for its choice; and, in the course of time, the proposed innovation could not fail to have a marked effect in doing away with much unworthy favoritism, and elevating the standard of scholarship in our institutions of learning.

It might be urged, as an objection to our plan, that American colleges are not intended to foster independent scientific research, like the German universities, but are merely training-schools for young men in the ordinary branches of knowledge. "We have no need of professors," it might be said, "such as Draper, Marsh, and Whitney, who lead the vanguard of knowledge, each in his own specialty; and the kind of men we do need,—men who are fairly well-versed in various sciences and languages, and are capable of imparting what they know,—a president and a board of trustees are fully capable of selecting without the aid of any learned body." It is of course difficult to answer those who take this position; but we are very confident that, among the friends of our great universities, there is scarcely one who would avow such an opinion. It is a generally admitted fact that we have outgrown, or are daily outgrowing, the old English college system, in conformity to which our older universities were modeled. Harvard to-day resembles Berlin more than it does Oxford; Cornell and Johns Hopkins are fashioned rather after German prototypes; and Yale every year makes generous concessions to the scientific spirit of the age. If this evolution toward higher and more useful forms is to continue, the demand for eminent specialists in professors' chairs will be increased rather than diminished; and the professor of the old-fashioned type, who took to teaching as a *pis aller*, because he saw small chance of success in the law or the ministry, will have to limit his aspirations to grammar-schools and seminaries. It is as a means of facilitating this development that we have recommended giving the faculties a consultative voice in appointments. We are far from expecting, from the adoption of the measure, any sudden and radical change in the character of the teaching body in our institutions of learning. That, however, in the great majority of cases it would exert a gradual and wholesome influence in the right direction seems scarcely to admit of doubt.

The experience of the medical schools that have tried the experiment with questionable success need not discourage any one. Professional jealousies are apt to influence medical men to an extent which is rarely observed among scholars, and their continual rivalries frequently vitiate their judgments of each other, and

make them more willing to recognize the merits of an inferior than those of an equal. Under such circumstances, it is scarcely strange that their selection of colleagues should, in many instances, have been an unfortunate one. College professors are rarely placed in such direct antagonism to each other, and there are good reasons for believing that they would show themselves capable of a comparatively unbiased choice.

The Real Basis of Party Harmony.

A GREAT deal has been said of late about the importance of harmonizing the Republican party. The party was defeated last year in several States where it had been accustomed to win, and disastrously so in the State of New York; and this defeat was undoubtedly due to the dissensions in the party ranks. Meanwhile, the near approach of a Presidential election renders it of vital importance to the party leaders and those who live by politics to have their party in a condition to win, and this is impossible unless the differences that exist within it can be in some way removed. These differences are in part of a factional character, and it seems to be the factional quarrels alone that the politicians are concerned about. The remarks that have appeared on the subject in the newspapers, and the various plans that have been proposed for securing the harmony desired, all have reference to these factional differences, and it seems to be thought that if these can be removed, the union of the party will be effectually secured.

It has been proposed, therefore, that here in New York, where the dissensions in the party have been most bitter and their effects most disastrous, the party committees and associations shall be re-organized so as to admit the leaders of both factions, and that a convention of leading Republicans shall be held in the early summer to devise all necessary means for bringing the factional contest to an end. This plan for securing harmony seems to satisfy the organs of both the opposing groups, and it may be put in practice before this reaches our readers; and if it results as its authors believe it will, we may expect ere long to see Stalwarts and Half-breeds, Grant men and Blaine men, and all the other factions into which the party is now divided sitting together in harmony around the council table.

But meanwhile, the party leaders, amid all their efforts for harmony, have neglected to present any system of principles for their party to support. We beg, therefore, to remind them that, without such a system of principles to serve as a bond of union and a motive to action, no real harmony can be secured or would be desirable if it could be secured. The only use of a party is to be the exponent of some principle; and if a party cannot agree as to what principles it will advocate, it has no sufficient reason to exist, and must inevitably dissolve as soon as important questions arise and demand solution. A party, in the proper sense of the term, is a body of men who do agree in their political principles, and who combine in order the more effectually to carry them into practice. Unless, therefore, the Republican leaders can present a system of principles on which their followers will unite, their party will go to pieces at last, in spite of all efforts to save it; while, on the other hand, if harmony of views can be secured, mere factional differences will give little trouble.

Now it is notorious that, at the present time, the party has no principles at all, and it is hard to see what principle or what policy can be found on which its members can agree. The questions of most immediate importance in our public affairs to-day are those relating to the tariff, the civil service, and the government of corporations; and on all these questions the most diverse opinions prevail within the party ranks. On the subject of the tariff, the disagreement is as wide as it can be; for the party contains men of all grades of opinion, from extreme protectionists to extreme free-traders, so that it cannot take a decisive stand upon this question without alienating a large portion of its members. In regard to civil service reform, there is not much disagreement among the rank and file; and if the party leaders would take up this reform in earnest and make it a party measure, it would serve, for a time at least, as a real bond of union. But, unfortunately, on this question the leaders themselves are in disagreement with their followers; and even if they should suddenly change their attitude and become advocates of reform, most people, we fear, would doubt the genuineness of their conversion. These considerations show how difficult is the task of harmonizing the Republican party, and how futile is the attempt to do so by merely healing factional discords.

It must be remarked also that the Democratic party is in much the same predicament as its rival, and for the same reason — disagreement on matters of principle. Last year (rather prematurely, as it would appear from late events) it was announced amid general jollification that all differences in the Democratic ranks had been healed, and that Tammanyites and Tildenites, who had so long been at variance, would hereafter work together in harmony. But now the party has struck a rock in the shape of the tariff question, and is in imminent danger of shipwreck; the divergence of views that has been developed being quite as great as that existing among the Republicans. This experience of the Democrats ought to serve as a warning to the Republican leaders and to politicians generally, that the only sufficient bond of union in political affairs is devotion to a common principle, and that if they wish to win success they must get their principles first and their party afterwards.

Meanwhile, the people do not care whether either party is harmonized; they care only to have their government well conducted and its abuses reformed; and if neither of the existing parties will do this work, they will readily provide a new one that will. What we specially need in our public affairs is a party of progress and reform — a party that will not sit lazily down, content with its past achievements, as the Republicans have of late been doing, nor resist important reforms, as the Democrats have too often done; but which will be ready at all times, wherever abuses exist or injustice is committed, to act with energy in the work of reform. The Republican party has done good work of this sort in years past, and if it will continue to do so the people will sustain it; if not, it must soon pass away to make room for some other organization which will better serve the interests of a progressive civilization.