

## \* Special Papers. \*

## AN INSTRUCTIVE EXPERIMENT IN COLLEGE GOVERNMENT.

BY JOHN BIGHAM.

IN the prevalent method of college government faculty and student are related as guardian and ward, the faculty standing to the student *in loco parentis*. Another system resembles absolute monarchy, the fiat of the educational czar being decisive. Both methods, the domestic and despotic, may indeed secure good discipline; but there is reason for the claim that they overlook facts and principles in student life which can be comprehended in a control equally efficient in maintaining order and more potent in training men for citizenship.

Amherst College has had such a method for the past eight years. It originated as one of the later outgrowths of the "new system" inaugurated by President Seelye, whose administration began in 1876. Early in his administration the college substituted for *in loco parentis* the plan of voluntary contract between itself and the student. Each agreed to fulfil certain conditions, a failure of either party resulting *ipso facto* in their separation. A phase of the contract plan was the discipline of the college. To aid in maintaining decorum, a method of representative control was presented, and in the spring of 1883, a college senate of ten men—four seniors, three juniors, two sophomores, and one freshman—was elected by the classes.

The theory of this governing body is that a true method of student control must grow out of the peculiar conditions of college life. The Amherst method considers the college as a union of trustees, faculty, and students for a common end. The students' relation to the trustees is remote; to the faculty it is closer but intellectual, formal, and periodic; while to fellow-students it is so intimate, intense, and personal, as to be all-powerful for good or for evil. The short-range influence of other students is the great moral force during the transition from the nurture of the preparatory school to the demands of professional or business life. The Amherst method believes that the undergraduates have far better opportunities than the professors for observing and judging student conduct. It would call forth their best powers. It would utilize the energies latent in student life which, being unknown to or neglected by other kinds of control, are either wasted or used for illegitimate ends. It would organize these forces into a subordinate representative body of students intrusted with definite and decisive jurisdiction. It would thus consider the students not as members of an unwieldy family or as subjects of a despot, but as citizens of a miniature state who are related to the faculty and to one another, not as repellant poles of the same magnet, but as parts of the same organism. Community of interest will therefore bind the college into a system between whose parts collision is impossible.

The hypothesis has been amply verified by the eight years' history of the college senate. At first its work was experimental

and its powers only partially defined; but these were gradually formulated until a simple constitution was adopted in the spring of 1885. On taking his seat each member signs the constitution, thereby "promising to act as a judge upon all matters" brought before him, and to endeavor in all his decisions "to seek always the good order and decorum of the college." The President of the college presides, but is not a member. He may vote on occasion, and by courtesy may present items of business. He has absolute veto over all its decisions, without which provision the senate might legislate over the faculty and trustees. Its decrees, if approved, are enforced by the authorities, so that offenders submit to the severe but sympathetic judgment of their peers. The senate meets regularly once a month, and oftener if necessary. The meetings are open unless otherwise ordered. In most of its work the weight of opinion rests, as it should, with the four senior senators.

There has been a steady enlargement of the senate's functions and influence since its first informal meeting as a "Board of Representatives," in June, 1883. Its powers are judicial and legislative, the authorities being the executive. Its main purpose is to control discipline as provided in the constitution, Article IV., Section 1:

"Whenever a member of the college shall appear to have broken the contract upon which he was received as a member of Amherst College, except in cases pertaining to attendance upon college exercises, determined by the regular rules of the faculty, the case shall be brought before the senate, who shall determine both as to whether the contract has been broken, and whether, if broken, it shall be renewed."

Such cases are presented by a senator or by the president. The evidence is examined, and if it is found that the contract is broken, it is so affirmed, and the student is separated from the college. About four years after adopting the representative system the senate's constitution was enlarged, so as to extend its jurisdiction "over such procedures of any body of students relating to order and decorum as affect the whole college," in addition to its former control "over whatever other business the president or faculty may submit to it." This enlargement of its powers over student life made the senate more useful and lightened the faculty's duties. It has also formal control of certain social occasions, such as class suppers, for which its permission is necessary. Similarly it supervises some of the undergraduate publications. The athletic interests have from the first demanded much attention. The growing prosperity of the college athletics and a desire for better financial management led the senate, in the autumn of 1888, to appoint certain of its members supervisors of the various athletic organizations, and in the spring of 1889 to choose suitable alumni to assist them. Early in 1890 these provisions were supplanted by the formation, at the suggestion of alumni, of an athletic board, the senate appointing two of the faculty and three alumni to co-operate with the heads of the athletic organizations. In these ways its ability and usefulness in directing

various phases of college life have been manifested. Some of its provisions are for temporary needs, others become permanent features of its work. It is a conservative body, close votes being the rule on important measures. The classes generally choose for senators men of either high scholarship or sound judgment.

Perhaps the best illustration of the senate's methods and efficiency is a case which occurred five years ago. The seniors wished to defray part of commencement expenses by a dramatic entertainment in winter term. Formerly such events required the president's permission, but a recent enlargement of the senate's powers put the matter under its jurisdiction. A petition was voted by the class. The senate received it through the senior senators, and voted to consider it. A motion to grant it was debated at some length and carried by a margin of one vote. The president deemed it wise to veto this decision—the first and the only veto in the senate's history. Some of the senior senators, however, felt that the case should be re-argued. The president was willing to allow this, so as to do full justice to them and to the class. At a special meeting about a week later, the senate voted to reconsider its previous action on the petition. The original motion to grant it was then debated thoroughly, and was lost by a margin of one vote. The president sustained this decision, and the petition was thus finally rejected. Later, the class's petition for dramatics in the spring term was duly presented, debated, and granted, and the action of the senate was approved by the president. The entertainment was accordingly given.

Occasionally matters of special interest have caused much excitement among the students and in the senate meetings. The attendance has been large, the debates earnest, and the votes close. Despite the intense feeling aroused, the senate's decisions have always been readily accepted by the college, even when opposed to the students' wishes. These crises have been at once the severest test and the best proof of the wisdom and efficiency of college autonomy. At such times the students have shown a jealous watchfulness over their prerogative of self-government, thus confirming its permanence and importance in college life.

Doubts as to the success of the representative system of control are met by its history. It is evident that considerable ability is shown by the students in other phases of their life. Successful management of the athletic, business, social, literary, and religious enterprises demands skill and care in handling men and funds. But will not the students shrink from the task of disciplining their fellows? Not at all. College men are exceedingly critical and fairminded, and the love of justice pervades the disciplinary and other work of the Amherst senate. Claiming just concessions from the faculty, they are pledged to justice in all their duties. The following is a good illustration:—A senior class had petitioned permission for an important event. One of the senior senators was the intimate friend, fraternity mate, and room-mate of the student leading the proposed enterprise; but he, with his three senior colleagues, voted