

THE VARSITY.

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XVII.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, DECEMBER 9, 1897.

No. 9.

Some Aspects of Life in the University of Pennsylvania.

"The University of Pennsylvania is noted for its Medicine, Geology, Semitic Languages and Football." So spake a Toronto graduate to me in the year of '95, when I was contemplating postgraduate work; but at the end of two years' residence in this University it seems to me that the four departments above mentioned are not the only strong points of which Pennsylvania can boast.

Someone has said somewhere, however, that one ought not to write one's impressions of a foreign country after one has lived in it longer than six weeks, and perhaps I have lived in old Penn too long to judge it with wholly unbiassed mind, for things which at first seem distinctive and peculiar are so apt, through familiarity, to assume an air of reason and to become mere every-day matters of course, that length of experience itself becomes a limitation upon descriptive powers. With this brief apology I shall try to tell something of student life in some of its phases in this, one of the largest and oldest seats of learning on the continent.

To begin with externals, this University has the advantage of being situated in a large and beautiful city, and a city which has been accused of provincialism in the way in which it always speaks of "the University" without the further designation of Pennsylvania; but it is only the envious allies of other universities who regard this token of appreciative affection as provincial.

Philadelphia, of all American cities, is said to be the most conservative and the proudest of its old families, and the University of Pennsylvania is consistently proud of its age and pedigree, never failing to announce in its catalogues, commencement programmes, etc., that it was founded in 1740, and can trace its genealogy back to the distinguished name of Benjamin Franklin, who was one of the prime movers in the founding of the school out of which the University grew.

"In days of old, as we are told,
There lived a man named Ben:
A friend was he—and so are we—
To Pennsylvania men.
B-e-n Ben!"

As the song book has it.

Apropos of this tendency towards the respecting of persons, might be mentioned a note which was appended to one of the sample examination papers found in last year's class *Record*. It ran thus:—

"N.B. Examinations oral. If Jackson taught your father, uncles, cousins or grandparents, you receive the same mark as they did. If you use the Jacksonian pronunciation of Latin you will receive the highest mark given, if the first-named conditions are fulfilled."

But although the institution itself is so venerable, and its store of traditions is encrusted with the blue mould of antiquity so revered in this historic city, none of the actual buildings date back further than some twenty years ago.

Of these buildings there are about thirty, occupying some fifty acres of ground in the western part of the city, for all the faculties of arts, science, law and medicine are crowded together in one locality—the University Hospital, the Blockley Almshouse and Insane Asylum and the Woodlands Cemetery being also in logical and convenient contiguity.

Of its museums, laboratories, greenhouses and botanical gardens Pennsylvania is justly proud. The archaeological collections are said to be the finest in America, and the laboratories the most perfectly equipped in the country. In the museums are to be seen most complete and wonderful collections of the remains and relics of the Cliff-dwellers of Mancos Canon in S.W. Colorado, while the Babylonian section, presided over by the celebrated Dr. Hermann V. Hilprecht, ranks immediately after that of the British Museum and the Louvre. The section of Glyptics also is of remarkable interest, containing as it does the large and extremely valuable collection of engraved gems and amulets deposited by Professor Maxwell Somerville.

Of its old and large library Pennsylvania is also proud, but recent sad experience of missing volumes, and inadequate cataloguing moves me irresistibly to quote a passage on the subject recently discovered in a class *Record*, a passage which has been as balm to my injured feelings, and which will also serve (though it is a very mild example) to illustrate the freedom of criticism indulged in by the students in these yearly publications.

"The University library is famous for three things: its unsurpassed collection of useless literature, its attendants, and the manner of procuring books. The literature consists chiefly of learned works on the Chinese and Arabic languages, written in German. It requires a practiced linguist even to read the card catalogue, which is written in Hebrew by one. Here can be found every book that you do not want, from the *New England Primer* for 1836, or odd copies of the *Sunday World* for 1887, up to an expurgated edition of Shakespeare and a badly damaged copy of the *Enclopædia Britannica* (volumes from M to Z are missing)." There is so much truth in all this, and in what follows of the article, that I frequently find myself sighing for the very much smaller, but carefully selected and well ordered, library of Toronto.

Among the more recently erected buildings are Houston Hall and the Dormitories. The first of these is a club-house where the social life of the students is centred. Within its grey stone walls are to be found in tasteful completeness all those things which are dearer to the heart of the average student than Greek or chemicals: a good gymnasium, a swimming pool, reading room, billiard room, rooms for the use of the various organizations about college. Here in the spacious reception halls, with their