

I

PRINCETON COLLEGE

UNTIL the founding of Princeton there were in the American colonies of Great Britain only three colleges where a young man could receive a good classical and scientific education. Two of these were in New England ; Harvard had been established at Cambridge near Boston in 1636 under a charter from the General Court ; Yale, beginning in 1701, moving about from place to place, was finally located at New Haven in 1718 ; William and Mary College, in Virginia, had been chartered by the crown in 1693. The middle colonies were practically destitute of the means of higher education.

The desire for a college which would offer a comprehensive course of study was particularly strong among the Presbyterians of this section, so that they might not only educate their sons but also in this way procure suitable candidates for the ministry of their church, for which they were dependent on New England or the old country. For this purpose William and Mary was not only too far away in the days when the

stage coach was the speediest method of travel ; it was too largely under Episcopalian influence to suit the orthodox Calvinists of that day of denominational suspicion and exclusiveness. Harvard and Yale were both satisfactory on the score of orthodoxy but the distance was too great for the boys of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and even of New York. There was great need of a college where "religion and sound learning should receive equal attention." The Presbyterians did not wish a theological seminary, but a school of high moral and religious tone. Religion without learning, they said, produces fanaticism ; learning without religion produces skepticism. They desired the purest Christian doctrine and the best secular scholarship, both classical and scientific. At that time there was a faction in the Presbyterian church who laid the emphasis for ministerial qualification on religious experience. Rev. William Tennent and his two sons had opposed a rule of the synod providing that young men applying for licensure, not being graduates of college, should undergo an examination on the arts and sciences before the synod. Against this rule the Tennents protested and for this protest the synod, by a stretch of authority, censured them. Thereupon the members of three

Presbyteries from the vicinity of New York withdrew and formed a separate synod. The members of the new Synod did not all agree with the Tennents on the question of education ; they thought the Philadelphia men had gone too far in condemning the Tennents for their opinion. Believing in education as well as in ecclesiastical justice they determined, if possible, to establish a college. The partisans of fervid piety had been alienated from Yale by the expulsion of David Brainerd from that college. Brainerd was a religious enthusiast of rare spirit, warm heart and strong mind. He could not endure the cold-blooded manner of some of the New Englanders. In a moment of passion he told one of the tutors that that learned gentleman "had no more of the grace of God than a chair." Although he publicly confessed his fault he was promptly expelled. His expulsion was regarded as too severe a punishment and served to strengthen the determination of the New York men to establish a college where religion should not be discounted.

The Philadelphia men had tried to establish a school at New London, Pennsylvania, but it amounted to little and after a struggling existence became what is now Newark Academy, Delaware. Over in East Jersey Jonathan

Dickinson opened a private school at Elizabeth where he did his best to prepare young men for the ministry. Aaron Burr had a classical school at Newark, N. J. These were private schools and did not meet the large need. Dickinson and Burr consulted with two others, John Pier-son and Ebenezer Pemberton, as to the best way to establish a good college without any further makeshifts. Pemberton was the man to whom the Scotch society for propagating Chris-tian knowledge sent money for work among the Indians. These four men, not as representatives of the Synod, but on their own account, tried to obtain a charter for a college in New Jersey. Lewis Morris, Governor of the Province, refused to grant one in 1745. Why he refused is not stated. But his honour had a hearty dislike for dissenters, as he regarded these Presbyterians. The British Government had instructed the Provincial Governors that religious and educa-tional matters were under control of the Bishop of London, and no schoolmaster was to be per-mitted to keep school in the province without his permission. The rule was not always en-forced, but the Governor found it convenient to observe it in this instance. Thwarted as they were in their good enterprise the ministers did not abandon all hope. Perhaps they felt that

a college was predestinated. They waited and watched. One fancies that they did not lament sorely when Governor Morris died on the 21st May, 1746. It was not until the 22d October, however, that they renewed their application to John Hamilton, who, as President of the Provincial council, held the government until King George should appoint a new Governor. The council promptly granted the application, an action which does not surprise us when we learn that four of the councillors were Presbyterians.

The charter conferred upon twelve trustees the right to conduct such a college as they desired, at the same time securing the liberties and privileges of other Christian denominations whose members might care to patronize it. Although the charter was granted in October, 1746, the college was not advertised until February, 1747, the trustees making ready their plans in the interval. When all was ready the school of Jonathan Dickinson, at Elizabeth, was made the foundation of the new college and he became its first president. The advertisement announced that students would be admitted the fourth week of May, 1747, and the college started on its career. The first commencement was to have been held in May, 1748. But in October,

1747, the president died. Whether the trustees took any immediate steps to appoint his successor does not appear, but the students of the college went over to Newark and there completed their course under the care of Aaron Burr, one of the applicants for the charter.

During the summer of 1747, the newly appointed governor of the province, Jonathan Belcher, arrived in New Jersey, having had an experience of twenty years as governor of two New England provinces, during which time he had shown a marked interest in Harvard College, where he had graduated in 1699. The trustees of the new college of New Jersey were, therefore, hopeful of his favour. Soon after his arrival they applied for a new charter, some doubt having been cast upon the validity of the first one, which had been granted by the president of the council without the assent of the Assembly or the Crown. Before they should fix upon a permanent location for the college or expend money upon buildings, the trustees wished to secure a perfectly valid charter. Governor Belcher met them more than half way and granted them a new charter for which he also secured the sanction of the Crown. It could not be got ready in time for the graduation of the first class in May, 1748. Lest the



degrees of the graduates should not be valid under the old charter it was decided, at the request of the governor himself, who wished to be present at the first commencement, to postpone it, and it was not until the 14th of September, 1748, that it was finally approved; and that is why the commencement exercises of Princeton were held in the fall rather than in the spring for more than sixty years.

The new charter provided that the governor of the province should be ex-officio president of the Board of Trustees. To this proviso the clergymen objected, lest difficulties might arise under governors not in full sympathy with the other trustees, and, as Jonathan Edwards wrote to a friend in Scotland, "Might be men of no religion or Deists." On this point, however, Governor Belcher was firm and to this day, the charter having been confirmed by the legislature in 1780, the governor of the State is president of the Board. The college, however, is not a State institution endowed by public funds and is altogether independent of State control.

Princeton had been selected for the site of the college as early as 1747. No buildings had been erected, however, and in the meantime the school of Rev. Aaron Burr, at Newark, acted under the charter, he being chosen first presi-

dent upon its being granted. The first commencement was held at Newark, November 9, 1748, there being six graduates, one of whom, Richard Stockton, was afterwards a trustee of the college and a colleague of Witherspoon in the Continental Congress. Some of the trustees thought New Brunswick a more desirable location than Princeton and tried to induce the citizens to grant land for the buildings and the president's house. The commencement of 1749 was held there with the design of interesting the people. They seemed indifferent. The trustees in 1750 voted that "a proposal be made to the towns of Brunswick and Princeton to try what sum of money they can raise for building of the college by the next meeting, that the trustees may be better able to judge in which of these places to fix the place of the college." Again the next spring they offer to locate the college in the town on the Passaic if the citizens will guarantee a thousand pounds, ten acres of land near the college and two hundred acres of woodland not more than three miles away. The woodland was wanted to supply the college with fire-wood. The people of Princeton had bestirred themselves and came forward with an offer. The treasurer was instructed to view the land at Princeton as well as that which had at

last been offered by the New Brunswick folk. The latter, however, were unable to make a definite offer. Despite the preference of the trustees for that place the energy of the Princetonians in raising money and obtaining land was such that finally in January, 1753, it was agreed to accept the offer of Princeton, "when Mr. Randolph has given a deed for a certain tract of land." No better situation could have been chosen. Princeton lay near the centre of the province of New Jersey on the main coach road midway between New York and Philadelphia. It stands on high ground overlooking a beautiful stretch of country. Sufficiently in touch with the traffic and news of the day it was sufficiently remote to secure the desirable quiet of college life.

Money was needed for the erection of suitable buildings. Mr. Nathanael Fitz Randolph, who had given the land, also gave twenty pounds and promised to obtain subscriptions from his friends. Governor Belcher wrote to some wealthy men of New England who contributed various sums. There were not more than a thousand pounds in the treasury. People of New York and Philadelphia interested themselves. When the necessary amount could not be obtained in America Rev. Gilbert Tennent

and Rev. Samuel Davies, as has been already told, went "home" to Great Britain armed with letters of Governor Belcher and others as well as with a very earnest address from the Synod of New York. Other letters were sent to individual clergymen in the three kingdoms. The generous response of the people at "home" enabled the trustees to proceed at once with the building for the college and the President's house which were so far completed in September of 1756 that President Burr arranged to have the commencement exercises held at Princeton on the 28th. His own presence was wanting, for on the 24th he died. Good old Governor Belcher, also, had passed away on the 31st of August. So appreciative were the trustees of his kindness that they had proposed to name the new building Belcher Hall. The governor had been a warm admirer of King William III, and requested the trustees to call it Nassau Hall in honour of the king's house. Thus it came to pass that the colours of the house of Nassau, orange and black, are the colours of Princeton College.

There was no delay in choosing another president. Before electing any one, however, the trustees decided that "the salary of the president shall be two hundred pounds procla-

mation money of the province, together with the use of the president's house and improved lands with liberty of getting his fire-wood on land belonging to the corporation." They then elected Jonathan Edwards, the famous New England preacher and theologian. There was some delay in getting him released from his charge at Stockbridge, so that he did not arrive at Princeton until early in February, 1765. The fatality that seems to have pursued the other presidents overtook him. He died of the small-pox on March 22d. The next president, Samuel Davies, held his office less than two years. In September, 1761, Rev. Samuel Finley was introduced to the Board of Trustees, beginning his administration without any further ceremony. Dr. Finley added to the reputation of the college, which became more largely patronized by students and more generously favoured by friends. The funds increased considerably; there were offers of money for the support of poor students; a Virginia gentleman gave a hundred pounds towards maintaining a professor of Divinity, to which chair Rev. John Blair was appointed. Through Richard Stockton, one of the trustees, a petition for a grant of land was presented to the Crown, but it was refused, it was suspected, through the influence

of the Episcopalians. The president's salary had been increased from time to time until in 1766 it was four hundred pounds. In September of that year, Dr. Finley having died in July, before proceeding to the election of his successor, the trustees fixed the salary at two hundred and fifty pounds with the usual perquisites, and on the following day elected John Witherspoon. I have already stated that he declined the first offer. It may be well to give here more fully the reasons for his declination.

The college had been founded by individual members of the New York Synod after the separation of that body from the Philadelphia Synod. The members of the latter Synod had held aloof from the enterprise. In 1757 there was a reunion of the two Synods, upon which the Philadelphia Presbyterians and their friends asked for a share in the government of the college. From gentlemen of Philadelphia and Lewistown, Pennsylvania, had come offers of money upon satisfactory assurances involving this question. Upon the death of Dr. Finley it was hoped that these new friends might have a voice in suggesting or electing the president, but the Board of Trustees proceeded without them. It was represented to Witherspoon that the Presbyterians of America were at logger-

heads over Nassau Hall, and he had no desire to leave the disturbed church of Scotland, where he was a growing power, for a new land and church torn by dissensions, the nature of which he did not fully understand, and in which he might be the greatest sufferer. His own feelings were conservative; he had no sympathy with those who preferred emotional piety to educated, reasonable orthodoxy and without indicating his reason in his letter he simply declined to become entangled in the strife of parties in the American church. His reasons, however, were confided to his friends and some of these learned that there was real unanimity and peace in the American church, that the affairs and prospects of the college were prosperous and all his fears groundless. His regrets at his hasty declination soon became known and the trustees gladly reelected him. In the meantime, however, Rev. Samuel Blair, a graduate of the college in 1760, who had also been a tutor, had been elected president, but with the understanding that he should not enter upon his duties for a year, there being strong hopes of persuading the Paisley pastor to accept. As soon as he learned that Witherspoon might reconsider he withdrew. Witherspoon's election was unanimous, all the friends of the college in

both factions agreeing that his advent would settle many vexed questions. There was no man in America above the suspicion of belonging to one or the other party. No such charge could be brought against him.

The college had been in existence twenty years. From a position which placed it little above a classical school it had now risen to a rank among the best educational institutions in the land. Its curriculum was almost as good as that of Witherspoon's alma mater, the University of Edinburgh, although the faculty was not so large nor the equipment so extensive. There was no divinity school. Few precedents hampered the new president. No principal of a European university had as full liberty as he. The college was controlled neither by the government nor by the church, directly, but by an independent board of trustees, self-governing, self-perpetuating. Among the trustees were not only Presbyterians who were in a majority, but also Episcopalians, Independents and a Quaker. Supported by a reunited church, governed by such a body of representative men, a very promising future was before the college.

The number of pupils had increased until in 1766 there were about a hundred and twenty,

almost as many as there had been at the University of Edinburgh when Witherspoon matriculated there twenty-five years before. The curriculum offered what seems to us a very narrow range of study. During the first three years the Latin and Greek classics were thoroughly read. Orations were delivered by the students, both in Latin and English, public speaking being an art highly prized. Mathematics and the sciences, as much of them as were known, were pursued until the senior year, which appears to have been devoted to criticism and review, with more attention to original composition. How far the educational ideas of Princeton's faculty at that time approximates those of the present day may be seen in the account of Princeton written by one of the tutors in 1766, who tells us that "in the instruction of youth care is taken to cherish a spirit of liberty and free inquiry ; and not only to permit but even to encourage their right of private judgment without presuming to dictate with an air of infallibility, or demanding an implicit assent to the decisions of the preceptor." Each class recited twice a day and "always had free access to their teachers." The day must have been long, beginning at six with morning prayers, at which a student might be chosen to

read a portion of the Scriptures in the original and to translate it. Except for an hour in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening, the boys were kept at work upon their studies. College athletics there were none; no class matches, no intercollegiate games. Handball was the most exhilarating sport. All students were required to board in the college, the table being supplied by the steward, who also furnished fire-wood and candles. The delightful club life so characteristic of Princeton to-day was unknown. Freshmen were required to run upon errands for the boys of the three upper classes, and otherwise be at their service, until, early in Witherspoon's administration the custom was broken up by the trustees. A democratic spirit prevailed in the college, patronized, as it was most largely, by boys from every rank of colonial life, into which few of the class distinctions of the old country had been introduced. Penalties for breaches of college discipline were not the undreaded disorder marks of a later era, but fines of money which must be paid in full by the culprit before he could obtain his degree. The fines, however, were discontinued early in Witherspoon's connection with the college, except where injury had been done to the property. Suspension or expulsion were

extreme forms of punishment seldom inflicted. No cuts were allowed from prayers or recitation, and the president alone could grant leave of absence. Evening prayers were made the occasion for instruction in psalmody. No instrumental music profaned the walls of Nassau Hall's chapel, the voices of men and boys rising in full volume as they sang the paraphrases of the psalms, the leader catching the note from his tuning fork. Even on Sunday work must be done. Disputations on the subject of natural and revealed religion were given publicly in the chapel, the citizens of the town being privileged to attend, "in order to habituate the boys early to face an assembly, as also for other important and religious ends." As there was no church in the town the citizens attended the services in the chapel, where some of them were assigned pews for which they paid a rental.

Examinations were oral, conducted in the presence of the trustees and such visitors as chose to attend, by the president and tutors, and "any other gentlemen of education who shall choose to be present." It is plain that no "shenanigaging" was possible in such an examination. Although the laws required every candidate for a bachelor's degree to reside two whole years in the college, any person might

present himself for examination, and, if deemed worthy, receive a degree upon payment of eight pounds tuition for two years and the customary fees of graduation. Commencement day in September began the long term uninterrupted by vacations. Orations and disputations were given by those who had graduated a few weeks before. No Christmas or Easter recesses broke the routine, for these were popish feasts not observed by strict Presbyterians. A short vacation in the spring and another in the fall, neither exceeding two or three weeks, was all the rest given teachers or students.

Every student was required to pay two shillings sixpence quarterly for the rent of the library, a rule providing that no student might have the key of the library, that being in charge of one of the officers of the college. The total expenses averaged about twenty-five pounds, four for tuition, fifteen for board, three for laundry, two for fire-wood and candles, one for room rent, with six shillings for contingent expenses.

What pranks the students played the minutes of the trustees up to 1768 do not record. It was found necessary to lock the door of the cupola and place the key in the charge of the steward

whose duty it was to ring the bell, and who must permit nobody else to go up. Is it unlikely that even as early as 1766, as in 1876, the boys occasionally rang the bell at night or stole the clapper? There were laws forbidding various offenses, trivial and serious, which might disturb the peace of the Hall or the campus, and occasionally some luckless lad was obliged to pay a fine, which he did with good grace, but there were no expulsions. Several students neglected to pay their fees, which led to a law requiring them all to give bond in the full amount before they could enter college. This rule was found too hard and was amended so that the sophomores paid thirty shillings, the juniors forty, entrance money. A senior in arrears could not receive his degree until all arrears were paid in full.

This brief sketch of the history of the college and its student life gives us some idea of the work which lay before the new president. He faced the task of bringing together in support of the college two parties in the church, formally united but still jealous and watchful of each other. The endowment amounted to less than three thousand pounds, only a small part of that drawing interest. But the college stood high in

the public favour, attracting students from New England in the North and the Carolinas in the South, as well as from the immediate neighbourhood of New Jersey.

John Witherspoon

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