

HISTORY OF THE HONOR SYSTEM AT SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE

Prof. E. L. Green, in *The State*, March 11, 1906.

The South Carolina College opened its doors to students on the 10th of January, 1805. In the preceding December the Board of Trustees adopted regulations for the government of the new college, which were printed by D. & J. J. Faust, Columbia, January, 1805. The first section of the seventh article is as follows: "The rewards and punishments of this institution shall be all addressed to the sense of duty, and the principles of honor and shame," which has appeared in all subsequent editions of the by-laws. The first President of the college was Rev. Jonathan Maxcy, a native of Massachusetts, who came to Columbia from New York, where he was then President of the Union College. To Dr. Maxcy this article seems to be due. He was on the committee appointed by the Board of Trustees to draft the first by-laws, and in a letter addressed prior to this to the board, he tells them that he has sent them his plan of government, which, unfortunately, is not preserved. At his death in 1820, Prof. Robert Henry delivered a eulogy upon him in the college chapel. (An Eulogy on Jonathan Maxcy, D. D., Printed in Columbia, S. C.), at the State Gazette Office, 1822.) Prof. Henry said: "When Dr. Maxcy first entered upon his duties here, the nature of a college and of its requisite discipline were almost wholly unknown. The youth of our country were rarely committed to the care of teachers, before a strong conviction of independence and a disposition to assert and to exercise it, had sprung up in their minds. Dr. Maxcy had too much good sense to attempt to extirpate this elevated principle; he only sought to modify it. He appealed to the honor of his pupils, and required a faithful compliance with conditions, which they themselves had voluntarily undertaken to perform. With generous minds, such appeals are always powerful and most commonly successful. Such indeed has been the happy result in the present instance, that whatever ignorance may imagine

or calumny invent to the contrary, it may be safely asserted that few similar institutions can boast of a more ready and cheerful obedience to every salutary regulator."

From such a beginning did the honor system at the South Carolina College grow; for it is not to be supposed that the system was adopted as a whole at some definite time, but that it was the result of a process of gradual development. No copies of the by-laws printed between 1807 and 1849 are accessible, if in existence, so that it is necessary to make use of the minutes of the faculty and the Board of Trustees, and from the method of procedure in particular instances, determine what stage the development had reached.

During Dr. Maxcy's term of office, 1805 to 1820, while a student's word appeared not to be doubted in so many words, it was necessary often for him to bring forward other students to prove his statements, so that the disciplining of a student took the form of a trial. Increased liberality was largely due to the efforts of the students themselves, as is made evident by some of their petitions. More than once they claimed that their word should be sufficient. It is also true that they had an exaggerated idea of their own value to society, and were in general a turbulent set. Dr. Thomas Cooper succeeded Dr. Maxcy.

In 1823 a most serious offense was committed in the chapel. The faculty instructed the president first to lay the case before the students assembled in the chapel and endeavor to have them purge themselves of the persons who had committed so disgraceful an act. Nothing was done by the students, in fact, they refused to move in the matter. Thereupon, the faculty, "under the law of the college," required each man to exculpate himself by propounding to him the following question: "Were you guilty of the offense concerning which the present inquiry is instituted, or were you in any way accessory to it?" Thirty-one students answered in the negative and

were, "of course," exonerated and permitted to retain their standing; the others were suspended. (Minutes of the faculty, April 10, 1823.) In a communication to the faculty the suspended students say that if they had not been "fully satisfied of the total absence of malice, disrespect and even levity, they would feel themselves called upon as gentlemen and members of the college, to be aiding the faculty in punishing the perpetrator."

Two years later one of the trustees wished to make the discipline of the college more strict. In reply, President Thomas Cooper says, in his report to the Board of Trustees: "But, in fact, the system of government by mildness and remonstrance, by treating the students as gentlemen and worthy of confidence, has succeeded so well that the faculty have no good reason to change it."

By 1836, in which year an edition of the college by-laws was printed, a regular method of procedure had been established for the trial of offenders. As no copy of the by-laws of that year exists, the minutes of the faculty and a later edition of the by-laws which was almost a reprint of the 1836 edition, show that the faculty proceeded in a case of discipline as follows: "If there was strong presumptive evidence against a student that he was guilty of the offense with which he was charged, he was summoned before the faculty to answer 'yes' or 'no,' as to his own guilt; but he was not to incriminate anyone else by his answer. If he answered 'no,' he was considered prima facie, not guilty. If it developed later that he had told a falsehood, he was to be expelled for lying."

Any man suspected of cheating was forced by the other students to leave college. The minutes of the faculty do not contain mention of a case of cheating. Prior to the closing of the college in 1863, examinations were oral in the presence of the faculty, and once each year the examination was public.

Prof. Joseph LeConte, writing of the '50s, says in his autobiography: "I have said that the students in the South Carolina College were high-spirited, though turbulent. I should add that I had never previously seen (nor have I since), so high a sense of