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Sancti Spiritu 4

An Address

By Dr. J. Will Harris

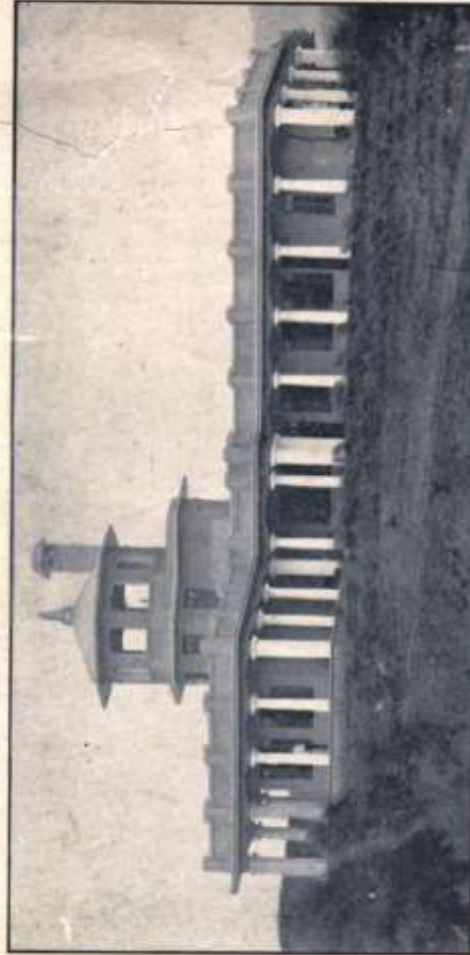
Founder and President

of the

Polytechnic Institute of

Puerto Rico.

August 27, 1935.



Loma Vista, the President's home since 1918.

OUR COLLEGE.  
1912-1935.

Members of the Faculty, Students and Friends:

We are assembled for the opening of the twenty-third school year. I wish to call your attention to our present equipment and to future possibilities.

We have a physical plant of seventeen all concrete, modern superior buildings erected by my brother, Mr. Clarence Harris, with his eye always on perfection and stability, according to the plans and specifications of our able architects, Stoughton and Stoughton, of New York, to whose artistic imagination stand the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Riverside Drive and the bridges on the Bronx Driveway. These buildings and the athletic field are memorial buildings rooted and grounded as monuments to the donors of their perpetual love and interest in the generations of students that are to pass through this college.

In addition to the above we have found here a location on seven hills covered with tropical trees and flowers, surrounded by mountains and valleys and cooled by the trade winds that climb up 4,500 feet to the crest of our eastern mountains and roll down in refreshing breezes, tempering the otherwise hot continuous summer into a perpetual spring. Even our nights are gladdened by all the constellations of the heavens from the North Star to the Southern Cross. The darker the night the brighter shine the stars and the nearer we feel that we can almost reach up and touch the skirts of the Milky Way.

The hills, valleys, mountains, stars and breezes say to us: "We are the expression of your Heavenly Father's love, interest, care of and forethought of you, faculty and students. He watches over you. He wants you to be perfect even as He is perfect. All creation, all knowledge, all experiences, all things are for the development in you of a perfect character. Use them all."

The courses now offered in this college are the accepted liberal arts courses commonly found in all colleges. We have been forced to this purely academic field by circumstances over which we have had little control. It is good as far as it goes but to my mind it is only a small part of what we should and could do if we had the means. The justification of our Liberal Arts College in Puerto Rico is its emphasis on definite Christian character and teaching.

For as E. Stanley Jones says: "The Christian is the creation of a new type of being, as different from

the ordinary man as the ordinary man is from the animal. The modern man is left by science without a goal; by exploded humanitarianism without a hero; by logic with an impasse. Men need nothing in these modern days so much as they need a working philosophy of life—an adequate way to live." "The real concern and confusion of this age," as Lord Haldane said, "is not so much religious, nor even intellectual, as moral."

The most important thing in education is not so much the subject matter learned from books; nor the drilling, concentrating and the disciplining of the mind; nor yet the ability to make high grades, however pleasant, attractive and profitable these may be. The great thing in education, and which most students miss, is the acquirement of right attitudes, great aspirations, and purposeful tenacity of the Christian.



Dr. Harris spent his first two decades on Texas cattle ranges following, unknowingly, the Persian curriculum, "Riding, shooting and telling the truth."

I feel we are now getting somewhere with our contemplated extension in our liberal arts curriculum. The Persian curriculum—"to ride, to shoot, and to speak the truth" is figuratively the better curriculum of studies for boys and girls—learning to do, to think and to hit the mark, for life in the hills and plains, for the discharge of everyday responsibilities. This is, in my opinion, the most cultural and efficient course of study for students in the liberal arts college of today. The college is the place and time for youth to learn, in addition to class room work, the great principles of living; to give and to take; to see good in every body and every thing and to incorporate that good discarding the bad; and to associate with all classes without lowering highest standards. Out of all this the student should emerge, at commence-

ment, clean, strong and prepared to enter life as it is. He should be prepared to keep out of the whirlpools of the mediocre excellence, and to grow into superior worth to society because of his association, in college, with people and with books which together with those every day common arts which I give in more detail below, develop true, worthwhile character.

The old college curriculum of Latin, Greek, Mathematics, and English was like a draft horse steady, hard pulling over muddy roads which finally landed us at the end of four years' study. We were at the end of college years launched out into the cold, presumably equipt with sufficient mental power and religious fervor to begin life. That curriculum broke down, but it had much in its favor.

Then came the elective system, where students had the choice of what they desired to study, if anything. They chose the easiest road and in high powered cars reached the end of this brainless system in a short thirty years. The brain trusters said specialization means highest efficiency of service. All students had to major, specialize. Result: 100,000 specialists graduating yearly and all specialized jobs filled. We are like a Latin American Republic with all our army holding the rank of general and colonel—all highly trained to command but no regulars to take orders.

I would like to see our liberal arts courses extended to include other cultural and practical phases of the best things in our modern life,—the things that will make a home a power of inspiration, a church a fountain of refreshing vigor and a state a common place of abode, the chief aim of all being to widen man's sphere of social effort and activity and to insure freedom and security in that sphere.

I propose the following additional courses:

**A. The Useful Arts.** This includes Home Economics such as sewing, needlework, cooking, care of children, foods, clothing, etc.; and also includes such portions of Agriculture as are related to the maintenance of a home, e. g., kitchen gardens for vegetables, rabbits and pigs for meat, cows for milk, chickens for eggs; with which the table may be supplied with food. In all these, knowledge and skill are demanded, and in their acquirement lies the educational value of their place in the curriculum of a college seeking to develop the whole man.

The Demonstration Service of the above.

The College Farms offer a practical application of all theoretical knowledge. The model dairy, pig pens,

poultry houses and vegetable gardens, will be the laboratories.

Inexpensive but well equipped modern cottages will afford home practice for the girls. They will learn to keep house in much the same fashion as they will later have to in their own homes; doing all the work, purchasing food, planning and cooking their meals on a regular allowance; washing their linen, entertaining at dinners and parties, arranging their furniture, pictures on the wall, curtains, etc. Through the performance of these household duties the women will acquire skillful and systematic adaptation of means for the attainment of a well ordered home as the embodiment of charming personality expressed in the order and the appearance of the home and in the ease and naturalness of the hostess.



Boringuen Hall for Women—One of today's seventeen all concrete, modern buildings of the Campus.

**B. The Free Arts.**

These are the arts that create form for its own sake, including music, painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture, poetry, etc.

**C. The Dependent Arts.**

This branch of Arts creates form that ministers to some useful end, e. g., interior decoration; landscape gardening; cabinet making and general carpentry; ceramics or the production of all objects formed by

molding, modeling and baking clay such as vases, base relief, cornices, and pottery in general.

**D. The Social Arts.**

A Community Rural Center will be established near the college to be conducted by the students under supervision. This will be a center in which the people of the community can gather in the evenings and on holidays for social, educational, and religious cooperation in the development of their common life as citizens of a democracy. In this social settlement work the student will see life as it really is for the common people and will be led in time to devote his energies and thought to our rural communities where 79% of our people live.

These community centers could be extended in

number to all the districts within reach of the college. At present there is no such center anywhere in the municipality of San German with its 20,000 population. In fact, this kind of work is nowhere found among Puerto Rico's rural population of 1,185,000 living on small farms among the hills of our little island.

I believe the above courses should constitute a part of our curriculum and count towards the requirements of a liberal education. The present system of higher education is preparing a race of individuals ex-

pert in one thing with little knowledge or interest in anything else, individuals learning more and more about less and less. It is leading us not to liberty but to slavery. I believe in specialization after the student's graduation from college.

Had Henry Ford been educated in modern engineering he would probably have been found today at his table working to perfect the third piston ring of a \$10,000 car some company was building. Had Thomas A. Edison been subjected to the rigors of a 20th century electric school, he would possibly have spent a life time computing how many accurate messages could be sent over one telegraph wire at the same time.

Harry Woodman Chase, (once president of the University of North Carolina, later of the University of Illinois, now Chancellor of New York University) in dedicating a memorial tablet to New York University's most famous professor of Art, Samuel F. B. Morse, the inventor of telegraphy, recently declared:

"Samuel F. B. Morse's ignorance of the best scientific thought a century ago saved him from impediment in his early experiments with the telegraph. Had Morse been a physicist with a physicist's specialized theory it is quite possible that his great plan of making the universe 'by kingdom right wheel' might never have passed beyond the stage of a dinner table conversation. It reminds me of the validity of a recent saying by Mr. Owen D. Young that our greatest assets are the things we do not know."

I believe that every student should be given a general cultural course stressing at all times the tact and skill necessary in business and social dealings; basing it all on the greater factor, namely, the integrity and honesty of individual character as fundamental both in private and public services, as statesman, churchman, business man or an ordinary citizen. I further believe that the major and minor should not be emphasized, possibly abolished altogether, except for those who are preparing for admission to higher studies, and that final semester examinations be discontinued. The credit system of units cut up into semesters and carefully packed away into frozen apartments of forgetfulness is falling far short of efficiency in education. I would have the student take at least one and maybe more hours (depending on the subject and the needs of the student) for a semester in the following: Languages, Biology, Mathematics and Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Astronomy, Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Ethics, Logic, Comparative Religions, the Bible and Religious Education, History, Government of our own country, the Useful Arts, the Free Arts, the Dependent Arts and the Social

Arts. As I have said, some of these could be covered sufficiently in one hour courses for a Semester; others require more time. The object is to give the student a broad general knowledge of and introduction to all fields, connecting and relating all knowledge into coordinate unity, and thus to create in him a sympathetic interest in all things.

The day of making all college students into specialists is passed. "At present a doubt is growing in the minds of many educators as to the educational soundness of the present extent of specialization. While the times demand specialists, the specialists themselves are finding in many cases that they are in need of a broader foundation. Their specialization grows with their professional contacts, but for their broad foundation they hark back to their college courses. Hence



Birthplace of Polytechnic, which served its day as school house, dormitory of both sexes, home for teachers and the president's family.

the present degree of specialization may be questioned on the grounds of purely educational considerations, as well as from the point of economy." (*Economy in Higher Education—Carnegie Foundation.*)

Life has become so complex during this generation, its demands so multiple and necessary, that the comforts and abundance of past generations would today be unbearable. We are rapidly emerging into a fuller, more complete life that demands prompt and drastic changes in our educational methods and curricula for mass education if our high ideals of a just and efficient

government are to be continued. The new possibilities and eminent perils that faced the Pilgrims Fathers at Plymouth were nothing compared with our present day possibilities and perils.

If we do not recognize that fact, we, as a college, are going to fail to do our full service.

I am further convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that no student who is trying, should be failed and compelled to leave college under the mental handicap of an inferiority complex that will haunt him to his dying day. If the student who is in earnest cannot do standard work in a certain course it is the faculty's duty to shift him into subjects in which he can do creditable work, and from which he may be graduated.

This college should not be allowed to function as a college planned especially for the brilliant student able to make "A" grades because of his superior mental machinery or indomitable will to study. It does not serve the common good in this preparation of the exceptionally endowed for high powered service. It thus condemns the less favored to service in the bottom of the ocean of obscurity. By far and large the great mass of students will never soar to the heights of the skies, nor will they sink to the depths of the sea. The student masses will go out of college to walk on the plane of God's common earth. We have been planning our courses and setting up our standards for the few. We must adjust our education to the needs of the masses of honest, willing students of ordinary capacity. We must find a way of linking up all knowledge from the first semester Freshman year to the last semester of the Senior year. Specialization is the work of the graduate schools not of colleges.

The general rather than specialized preparation is absolutely necessary today. This is due to the youthfulness of High School graduates on the one hand, and to the fact that the present system of specialization for all students has filled our country with an over supply of specialists for whom there are no fields of service in keeping with their specialization. This leaves the educators of today in darkness, experimenting on land and at sea trying to find a solution, hitting here and there, and utterly lacking in orientation. Probably one tenth of the students graduating from institutions of higher learning yearly would more than supply the demand for specialists.

Students today must be steadied and sanely guided into a regular life and rational thought growing out of broader sympathies acquired from first hand experience of general academic studies and practical arts based on the ~~same~~ foundation of Christ and His teaching. Our

students need a preparation for common every day living as home makers and worthy citizens of a free democracy, which democracy will either make or destroy them, depending not on the Government but on their attitudes, their industry and their perseverance in that which leads to the highest and common good of all.

Too often it is true that students have to readjust their whole way of living when they leave college and those who succeed do so in spite of their college mistraiding. We should make it doubly sure that our graduates succeed in no small degree because of their college training under our direction. They will do so if we try to fit the courses of study to the needs of Puerto Rico and cease trying to fit the students to the courses and standards handed down to us by other colleges. If we try to fit the student for clear thinking, honest endeavor, and not so much for getting ready for a final semester examination and a salaried position, we and they will succeed.

The student here should be trained to be honest, industrious, law-abiding, God fearing men and women of integrity, who will go out to establish a democratic society in the home and in their communities, and to help to maintain our democratic institutions and government to an ever increasing degree on the foundation of righteousness, justice and equity.

This, I believe, is a worthy aim and should be the great objective: the development of every student along his natural gifts through a broad, general training, into a well rounded character, resourceful, independent, and of a sturdy Christian faith; full of hope in himself, in his fellowmen and in the providence of God.

Such is the college ideal I had twenty-five years ago and such is the college in which I am interested in furthering to the Nth degree on our present solid foundation of liberal arts till it becomes a power in Puerto Rican education and an example to other colleges that are sure to spring into being soon over all Latin America.

In this paper I have simply restated my original ideas when I started this school in 1912. Let us hold our academic courses to a high standard—such as will be acceptable to other colleges of liberal arts; let us introduce our students to the modern methods of life and maintenance of the home through the performance of practical duties related to the home. Let us endeavor to encourage our students always in the preparation of themselves not for making money but for entering into a gloriously endowed world in which there has been and will always be a place and employment for every individual talent of the adequately trained men, with a guarantee of the supply of all their needs—physical

and spiritual. Let us perfect our college not as a center for social snobs but into a power house for the development of character, according to our charter specification, "Independent, resourceful and of a sturdy Christian faith."

In doing this our college will best serve the present generation and will find a growing field in the leadership of educational development of our part of the world.

We, as a college, owe therefore a twofold debt and obligation, to earthly friends who have given us these beautiful buildings and to our Creator who has supplied us so bounteously with natural surroundings. We can discharge this obligation in the faithful performance of our duties and in the care and protection of what has been given us to use for a time. In doing thus we may confidently undertake great and greater things assuredly anticipating heaven's blessing and earthly joys in the accomplishment and fulfillment of our ideals.

Founded on the rock of God's unchanging love as set forth in the teaching of Jesus Christ, His Son and our Lord; with a goal of a perfect character to be developed in every student, and by maintaining an open mind to receive the contributions to thought and to progress from every succeeding generation—this college will continue to serve, under Divine leading and grace, more and more efficiently Puerto Rico and mankind everywhere.