

WINCHESTER COLLEGE.

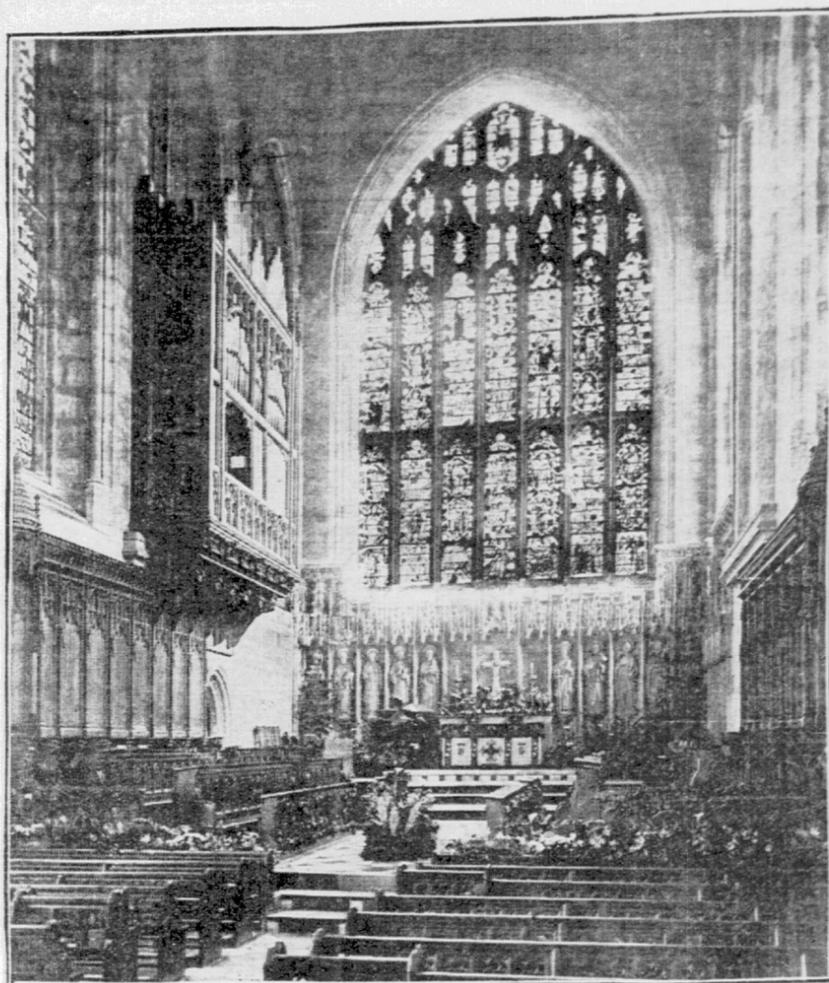
The Oldest Public School in England
—Conservatism and Progress.

Winchester, November 20.

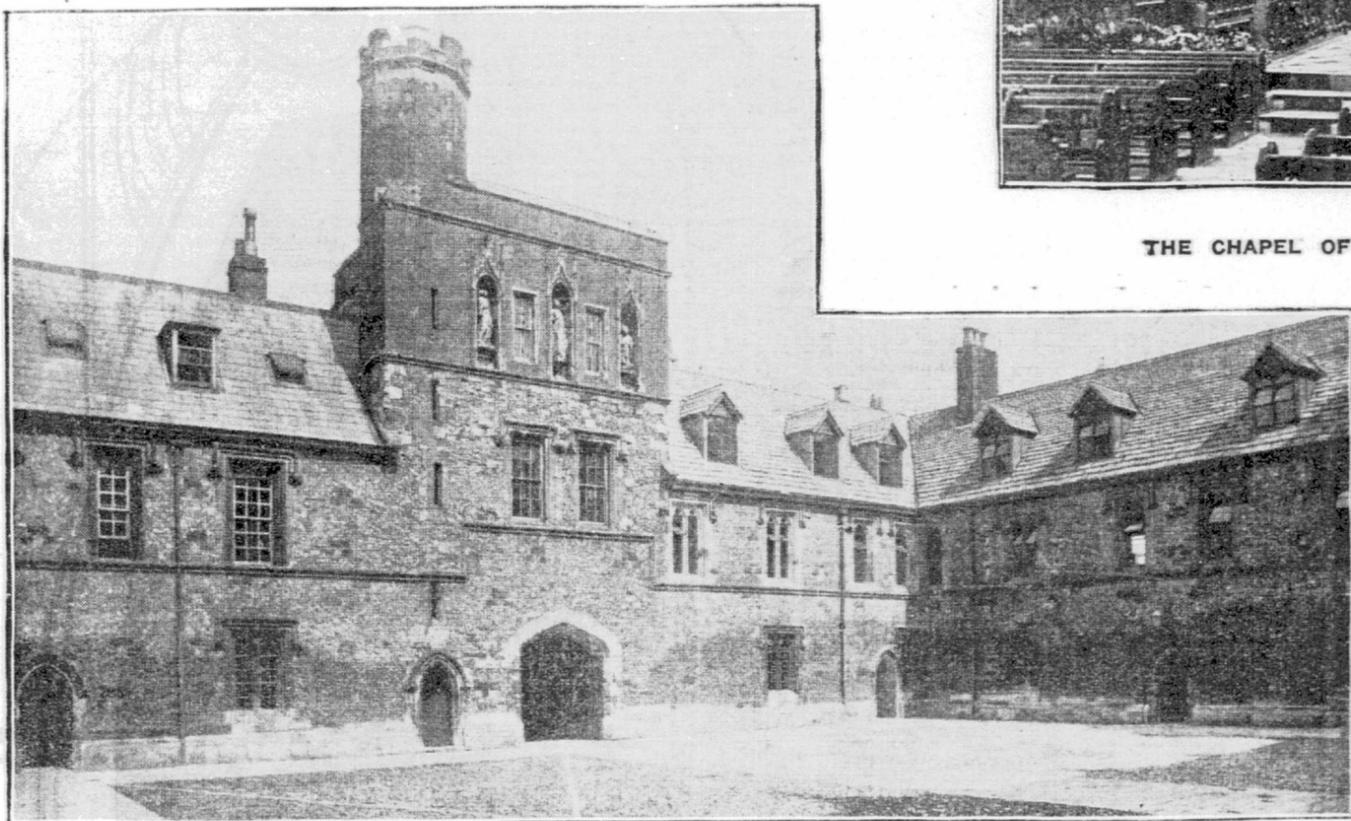
Winchester College holds a unique position among English public schools. It is not so large as Eton, nor so smart as Harrow, nor so progressive as Rugby; but it is the oldest and most conservative, and in organization, discipline and general methods it has been the working model for the other great schools. Founded toward the close of the fourteenth century by William of Wykeham, when schools were unknown in England except as nurseries for the priesthood, it was the first institution for the education of boys of all sorts; and it not only supplied headmasters for Eton, Westminster and other foundations, but it also introduced Greek, promoted a feeling of independence among students, intrusted governing powers to the boys themselves in the prefect system and defined the lines and embodied the ideas on which the public school movement has been conducted. Its pre-eminence in age and authority has strengthened its conservatism. It has remained the most sluggish and old-fashioned public school in the kingdom, when rival institutions have been attracting the sons of rich and influential families or making

and said their prayers. Time has gradually brought modifications of the primitive plan, but the tradition of the common life has been maintained. In place of the open air moat the chambers are now supplied with bathrooms; and within the last forty years the fellows and tutors have disappeared from the upper rooms, which have been converted into dormitories for the scholars. Four of the lower chambers have been refitted as sitting rooms, with stalls or writing places known as "toys," where each student has a private corner of his own for work. The "toy" galleries are, however, essentially common rooms under the supervision of prefects, and the dormitories above are not partitioned off. The scholars not only live together as in the old days, but they take their meals in the ancient dining hall, and except at dinner they use the old-fashioned beech trenchers in place of plates; and while the metal tub containing remnants of food is not placed outside the door as in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the bread and meat left over are still given to poor families outside the school.

The tradition of the common life has not been lost in all the changes and enlargements since the original foundation. When the school was built in the seventeenth century, with a violent transition from Perpendicular to Jacobean architecture, there was a large room where four masters in the corners could teach their classes simultaneously and where the boys not reciting



THE CHAPEL OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE.



CHAMBER COURT, WINCHESTER COLLEGE.

a reputation for breadth of views and flexibility of methods. With a record of more than five centuries of uninterrupted operation, it has only 20 students, seventy of them scholars on the original foundation and 350 commoners in nine boarding houses. The attendance might easily be doubled, for there are always a dozen candidates for every vacancy; but the Wykehamites prefer to go on in the old way, picking and choosing their men, after careful examinations, and avoiding the dangers of overgrowth. Winchester has retained its primitive simplicity and characteristic traits while other schools have been adapting themselves to the requirements of a rich, leisured class. It is a solid, working school, where the sons of peers and millionaires are not to be found, and where men are trained for careers in the church or at the bar rather than for public life and the military services.

Conservatism has been shown in the tenacity with which the original idea of a common college life shared on equal terms has been retained. When the visitor, passing out of the cathedral close, turns sharply down College-st. beyond Jane Austen's house and the headmaster's residence, with the high, sham chimneys, he crosses the outer court formed by the warden's house and stables and the ancient brewhouse, and enters Chamber Court by a second gateway adorned with statues of the Virgin, Gabriel and the founder of the college. It is a sombre but picturesque quadrangle, with black flints in the timeworn walls and the open space paved with cobblestones and flagstones; and behind it are the chapel with a high tower and the cloisters with a chantry in the inclosed garth. This is the historic foundation for the scholars built by William of Wykeham and his immediate successors, and the structures were arranged so as to provide a common life for all the inmates. On the ground level in the court were the six big chambers where the seventy scholars lived and slept together without privacy; the upper rooms were occupied by the fellows and instructors; there was a conduit in one corner where the men washed; there was a hall approached by a stone staircase where they took their meals together, and connected with it were the butteries and kitchens; a seventh chamber was the old schoolroom; and in the chapel and chantry they attended services and in the cloisters they walked

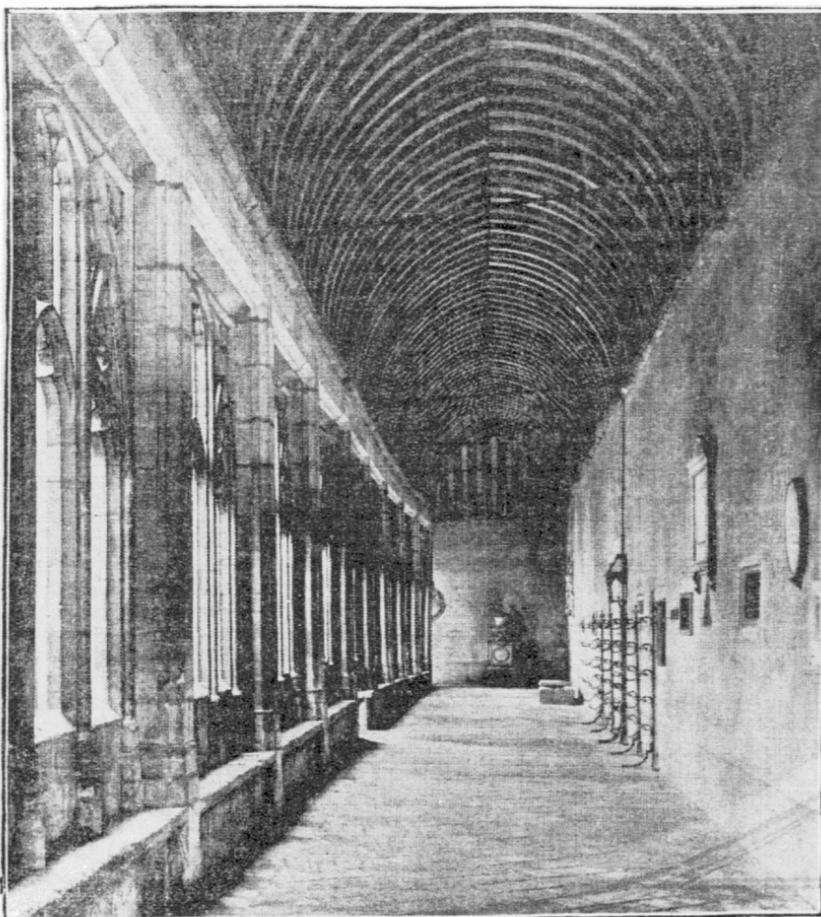
their lessons could work at the "scobs" or boxes with benches in the centre. This was the common schoolroom until twenty years ago, when separate classrooms were provided; and it is now used only for concerts and ceremonies like

speech day. When Dr. Moberly undertook midway in the nineteenth century to replace the Old Commoners with better accommodations for students without scholarships, he retained the main ideas of the former remaining structures,

and with so little success that after his time the New Commoners was reconstructed into the present group of classrooms, library and other school buildings in Flint Court, without form or style, and contrasting strangely with the austere dignity of the older and more picturesque foundation. Even when the Commoners were taken outside and lodged in nine large boarding houses kept by masters, there were meagre arrangements for privacy in study and life. There were few cubicles and separate bedrooms, and the general plan of Chamber Court with its "toy" rooms and dormitories for common life was closely imitated.

With equal tenacity the traditional methods of discipline by the senior boys have been maintained at Winchester. William of Wykeham, in his fourteenth century statute, provided that there should be eighteen prefects, three in each of the six chambers, who should supervise the work of their fellow students, be responsible under oath for their conduct and be empowered to reprove and punish delinquents. That was the origin of the prefect or monitor system, which was carried to Eton and Harrow from Winchester and adopted by Dr. Arnold at Rugby, himself an old Wykehamite. It converts a public school into a self-governing community, with the headmaster as a final court of appeal. Carried to extreme lengths at Winchester and other schools two generations ago, when there were as many as a thousand floggings in a single institution in the course of a year and all the younger boys had a rough time and were systematically terrorized, it has been reformed and regulated until there are now few abuses. On the Winchester foundation there are still eighteen prefects responsible for the conduct of the scholars, and in the larger body of Commoners there are also house prefects; and they have the exclusive privilege of fagging juniors and of exacting obedience under the penalty of "tunding" or caning boys across the shoulders with an ash stick. In extreme cases the delinquent is conducted to the headmaster, Dr. Burge, for a thorough birching; but ordinarily the prefects maintain discipline with the ash. The victim of discipline can appeal to the headmaster, if he likes, from the arbitrary decision of the prefect, but this is seldom done. The prefects are limited to twelve strokes when they punish the boys, and they can reduce the penalty at their discretion. The masters and tutors have nothing to do with the discipline of the men. The prefects keep order in dormitories and recitation rooms, read the lessons at week day services, report absentees from chapel and order the college sports, assigning the places in cricket and football and enforcing daily exercise in playtime. Their rule is universally accepted at Winchester as the traditional order, and there is no spirit of revolt against it. So excellent is the discipline that punishments are seldom inflicted and the licensed fagging by prefects is a very different thing from the old-time bullying, which took the spirit out of schoolboys and rendered them insensible to suffering.

The Winchester day begins as early as 6:15, with a study hour before chapel and breakfast, and continuous work in classroom or "toy" stall until 12:15. There is an hour for cricket, football or other sports until dinner time, and recreation is also compulsory with juniors until 3:15, when study and recitations go on for three hours. After tea there is "toy" time in the sitting rooms until supper and chapel; and after



THE CLOISTERS OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE.