

Race Prejudice at Cornell.

James B. Clarke, '12.

“THE time for silence is gone by, and the time to speak is come,” said Martin Luther. The time is come to say something which is relatively as important to our little community as was Luther’s world-stirring letter to the Christian princes of Germany. But while the great reformer broke down three walls which Rome had been fifteen hundred years in building around the religion of Jesus Christ, I wish to break down a single Wall of Prejudice which, barely forty years after its birth and while some of its sponsors are still quietly, though none the less interestedly, watching its growth, the Cornell University is rearing in its midst, in defiance of the purpose of its Founder.

Ezra Cornell’s object is still expressed in the seal of the University: “I would found an institution where any person might obtain instruction in any subject.”

To the casual observer the number of students and illustrious graduates of both sexes and from every corner of the globe would seem to indicate that Mr. Cornell’s purpose had been more than realized. As a matter of fact the University is now and has for some time been disregarding the object for which it exists—to furnish instruction and consequently everything that makes instruction possible or profitable and that *may be provided*, to *any* person who desires it and can pay for it. The University lavishly furnishes the bare instruction. It has not the means to supply in like manner the two indispensable and providable concomitants of instruction, food and lodging. But such facilities as it offers it withholds from some who are entitled to them.

Four years ago a *person* who wished instruction made application before arriving here for accommodation in the dormitory for female *persons*. The officials in charge of the building found out that the applicant, although not more heavily pigmented than the average resident, belonged to a type of persons known as colored. Shortly after, the father of this girl received a curt note

containing his deposit and informing him that it was a cruel imposition not to have said that she was a negro. He replied that he was not so sure about his daughter's race, but that he did know she was a woman and that, according to the Cornell University Register, "The dormitories for women students are Sage College and Sage Cottage."

Last year two women students who had grown tired of climbing the hill or getting half frozen waiting for the street cars wished to obtain rooms nearer to the University. The only place where they could even dare apply was Sage College. Here the Dean informed them that while she herself had no objection to letting them draw for rooms, some of the other occupants of the building would make it very unpleasant for them. These women were therefore obliged to go back this year to the negro quarter in the lower part of the town; to hurry back and forth to their meals; to waste in going up and down much time and energy that they ought to spend in assimilating the instruction that is given them; to pay more for carfare and living expenses than women in better pecuniary circumstances.

Is this the way that Mr. Cornell's idea is being carried out? Is this the way that Goldwin Smith's memory is honored and respected? Does Andrew D. White approve of this state of affairs? Such a condition cannot fail to keep away from the University many persons who would like to obtain here the instruction which is absolutely denied to them at institutions nearer their homes. It must prevent the colored women who are here from getting the most out of the opportunities offered to them. When an examination depends on the reading of a book on the reserved shelves, what chance has a girl who is too tired and worn out to get up the hill on a stormy night? I live near the campus and I know that for weeks it is often impossible to read an assignment except one reaches the library before 8 A. M., 2 P. M., or 6:30 P. M., for after these hours a Sage College girl will almost surely have the book.

As a male colored person I have been able to solve the difficulty of getting food and shelter near the place of instruction. I have quarters in a building which the University rents to students and

a few professors. In my freshman year, after I had been served one meal in a dining hall and had heard a boarder ask whether Niggers ate there too, the student manager told me: "We probably won't be able to accommodate you regularly. The house is pretty full now." Some time later I went one day to the lunch room where I had been taking my meals, and a student abruptly got up and went out, leaving his sandwich and milk not half consumed. I did not give the proprietor of this place a chance to intimate to me that I was driving away his patrons. Since then I have been getting my meals at the expense of a little time and an occasional hurt to false pride.

But a colored person of the gentle sex—for we, too, have *a gentle sex*—cannot be so easily provided for. She may not live in Cascadilla building without a chaperon. Must she wait at table in a fraternity to get food near the university? It was especially to provide instruction that was not provided elsewhere, or *that was refused* to those who sought it elsewhere, that Ezra Cornell and Andrew D. White established this University. At that time it was very doubtful whether women were at all fitted for the higher education on equal terms with men. The women of Cornell University have amply justified Mr. Sage's benefactions. At a time when it is enjoying the bequest of a man whose long and honored life was a model of broad, human sympathies, can this university barter the ideals which are embodied in Goldwin Smith Hall for the narrow, unreasoning, inhuman prejudices of a few women students?

I am taking the Dean's excuse for turning away colored girls from Sage College as real and sincere. But has she sufficient reason on which to base her opinion? The groundless fear of a thing often does much to create the thing that is dreaded. I do not believe, I cannot believe that Cornell women are so little appreciative of what the University has done for their sex that a majority of the occupants of Sage College would exclude girls from residence merely on account of their color. But in any case that could not affect the official attitude of the University. There is a *place* for everything under the sun. This is *not* the place for the Atlanta Compromise. The most rabid Negrophobist and

Caucasian protectionist of the South will admit that white civilization is nowhere imperilled by the presence of one-half per cent. of blacks. This is not a question of planters' daughters and cotton pickers or mammies in Alabama, nor even of fashionable débutantes and scrubwomen or laundresses in New York. It is simply a matter of accommodating regularly matriculated women students in the dormitory for women. The one thing for the Dean to do is to give every applicant a fair chance to get a room and, if she gets it, to see that she enjoys all the privileges of the building.

This does not mean that every woman must necessarily belong to the secret societies. Any girl will find enough sisterhood or "sorority" in the fellowship of compatible temperaments. If, after that, any resident shows by her conduct towards one of her sex that she does not deserve to be called a lady, she should be excluded from the building. She will have no difficulty in finding rooms outside, or she may go to some school where she need not hurt her eyes at the sight of a colored woman. "We are not looking for students. We don't advertise,"—the ever-irate gatekeeper of the University once said to a man who was trying to enter with a faulty passport.

In the South it is, of course, out of the question for a colored person to think of entering an institution of the standard of Cornell. In the North a dark face is often turned away, disappointed and deceived, from a school that is not honest enough to put up the sign: NO DARKIES. Not long ago a girl was refused admission to some college because it was found that she was one-sixteenth Negro. One of the most richly endowed educational institutions in this country, a woman's college in Pennsylvania, is by the will of its founder, exclusively Caucasian. A good Cornell student was obliged to come to Ithaca because she was not wanted at a new woman's college in her home town, only forty miles away, although the founder has never drawn any racial lines. Our founder distinctly rubbed out all such lines. Shall this girl be made to feel that she is not wanted at Cornell?

Sage College is not the only institution controlled directly or indirectly by the University for the benefit of its students, where this

question would be answered in the affirmative. But this manifestation of race prejudice is only a part of the general decay of the old time Cornell. Some time ago a graduate of '91, a man who has done more credit to his Alma Mater than any ten men of the class of 1911 probably ever will do, lectured before the University. I afterwards asked him what he thought of the wonderful growth and improvement since his undergraduate days. "Too much prosperity," he replied. "What can you mean? Who ever could be too prosperous? Where was your Arts College, your Ag. College, your Rockefeller Hall?" I asked in astonishment. Just then a young gentleman swept by us, haughty and luxurious in his winter apparel. "Too many fur coats," the "old grad." said, significantly.

There are none "too many fur coats" in Sage College. There are far too many *fur-coated minds*. Cornell University is essentially democratic. It is its democracy that won the heart of Goldwin Smith and made the eminent scholar who had been the teacher of the heir to the British throne come here to lecture to the heirs to the American plow, without salary or reward other than the pleasure of trying to make men *Human*. It is only democracy that produced such a distinguished alumnus as David Starr Jordan. It is this democracy that has sustained Cornell through her early poverty and hardship and brought her to her present more prosperous condition. In the last analysis all true Americans are at heart non-fur-coated farmers' sons and daughters, and there is no truer American than the American Nigger. Cornell University was founded by a farmer and is intended for farmers' children.

The maintenance of this true Cornell spirit depends principally upon the students. A hat decorated with certain peculiar hieroglyphics is in itself inoffensive, but when it is openly flaunted as the badge of exclusiveness and aristocracy a democratic student body can have it thrown away. Some of the finest men and women in this University keep their *bodies* warm with furcoats, but their *minds* are self-protected by a large native fund of *un-*common sense and are thus left open for the acquisition of further supplies of this most precious commodity. On the other hand the sweater-vested and slickered bodies often sustain minds coated

with fur and impervious to new impressions. I want all Cornell students to cast off their *furcoat ideals* and the *ideals* represented by the *hats* which they have already thrown away. Cardinal Newman is not alone in thinking that the best part of a college education lies not in the books, but in the *students*. You must study them and know them if you would fit yourself for *life*. You cannot do this if you hold aloof from them or push them away from you. The more they differ from you and your own type, all the more reason why you should know them. To spend all your time in little cliques and coops with the people whom you knew before you came and whom you will know after you have gone is to refuse to open a new book and master a new subject. If it had the money the University could provide board and lodging for all its students. But the one best thing in college cannot be handed out to order. It must come of itself from the students themselves.

I am not asking anybody to change violently his inborn convictions. I am not asking anybody to do what he believes to be detrimental to his conception of the *best*. But I do wish for myself, and I believe I am voicing the sentiment of other students, that there were enough *Cornellians* here to make me feel that there was one place on this continent where I could spend four short years without being constantly reminded to keep my place as a Nigger, a social outcast. By *social outcast* I do not mean one who is not invited to dances and teas. I mean a person who, in a Hall of the Humanities or in a Christian Chapel, involuntarily repels other persons as if he were a loathsome and contagious object, a creature for *people* to flee from as from the pest now raging in Manchuria.

The authorities of the University also have their part in keeping alive the Cornell spirit. The man who asked whether Niggers ate in a public refectory now sits in an instructor's chair in Goldwin Smith Hall. My own experience with professors would not justify the columns of editorials on "the gap between professors and undergraduates" which recently appeared in the *Sun*. But how would this man behave to a Nigger who went into his class? A university is a place where Truth is sought and taught—broad, uni-

versal, all-pervading Truth. It is the last place on earth to foster narrow, racial, personal prejudices. If one instructor does not like Niggers, another may despise Chinese, a third may hate Jews, and a fourth may have no use for anybody but himself, as the *Sun* seems to think. Then what becomes of the instruction for *any* person? This is not the type of teachers that Cornell began with. These are not the men who make sacrifices in order to *do* things for others. A man who has strong racial or class antipathies is bound to show them. And if he has to train minds and shape character! Such a man can never be a teacher in a cosmopolitan, democratic university.

I wish to say in conclusion that no man has asked me to make this appeal to the fair-mindedness of the University public. Far from that, the persons whose statements in conversation primarily inspired it would probably rather have me say nothing. But as with Luther, so it is with me. The sense of wrong is in my system. I have to get it out and impart it to those who can right it. Moreover, I know that persons not colored could say things like what I have said. And these things should not be said of Cornell.

Cayuga.

Gordon B. Dukes, '10.

Sweet, aye sweet, thy glancing ripples dancing 'neath the June-tide sun,
Soft, aye soft, thy gentle lappings when the zephyrs have begun
To trip with silver measure to the rustling cadence of the breeze,
That stirs amidst the sombre shadows of thy summer-tinted trees.

Fare thee well, bright Nature's emblem laughing 'neath the June-tide sky,
With a sigh did I first seek thee, now I leave thee with a sigh;
Care-dispelling, bliss-inspiring, when beside thee moments fly
Fleet as ever 'neath Love's bower, Love's first kisses waltzed them by.