

EXTRACTED FROM

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

FOUNDERS AND THE FOUNDING

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and University Historian
in Cornell University*

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FOREWORD

This little book is extracted from lectures given by one of Cornell University's most distinguished and revered scholars, Carl L. Becker, and is mailed to each new faculty member on behalf of the President, Provost and Dean of the University Faculty.

Many years have passed and numerous changes have occurred in our society since this university opened in October 1868, yet the vision and values that Ezra Cornell and Andrew D. White hoped to infuse and inspire in this "new" university continue to influence and guide it. *Diversity, special distinction in scholarship, the library as an indispensable part of a great university, absence of racial, sexual and religious discrimination, non-sectarian character of trustee, faculty and student membership* are but a few of the themes which influenced their thinking and strategies in establishing this institution and are still important today.

We hope you will take the time to read these *extracts* which should help you better to understand Cornell University. We are delighted that you decided to join the faculty and we wish you great success in your teaching, research and scholarship and as an active participant in the affairs of the University.

Jeffrey S. Lehman, President

Carolyn (Biddy) Martin, Provost

Charles Walcott, Dean of the Faculty

September 2003

Life and Learning in the United States

It shall be the duty of the General Assembly, as soon as circumstances will permit, to provide by law for a general system of education, ascending in a regular gradation from township schools to state university, wherein tuition shall be gratis, and equally open to all.

INDIANA STATE CONSTITUTION, 1816

I HAVE often wondered what the United States would be like if it had been first settled at another time and by other people—if it had been settled, say, in the thirteenth century, the eastern seaboard by the Norman French, the western by the Chinese, with the two frontiers subsequently meeting on a line running roughly from New Orleans to Minneapolis through Kansas City and Omaha. It's an intriguing thought. Unfortunately, we must be resigned to the prosaic fact that the settlements of greatest importance for the future history of the United States were made chiefly by Englishmen, and in the seventeenth century.

Whether the institutions of the United States were inherited from Europe or newly devised to meet the novel conditions of the American wilderness is much disputed. I cannot decide that dispute; but certainly the first settlers had acquired in England certain ideas about politics, morality, and religion that must have had a decisive influence in determining the original form of the institutions they established in Virginia and New England and elsewhere. Among the ideas thus brought to America were the ideas then prevailing in England about schools and universities. In this respect the seventeenth century might be thought a bad time for the United States to begin its institutional career. At

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almost no other time, certainly not in the thirteenth century, could the first settlers have brought to these shores a set of ideas more restricted or less promising for the promotion of learning in the new world.

In seventeenth-century England, as in Europe generally, the prevailing idea was that schools and universities should teach nothing that would discredit the established religion or the authority of kings and magistrates. There were, it is true, some voices raised in protest. Francis Bacon protested, and with good effect, against an arid scholasticism and a slavish worship of ancient writers. Milton complained that professors "take from young men the use of reason by charms compounded of metaphysics, miracles and absurd scriptures"; the result of which was that at Cambridge he had misspent his own youth trying to digest "an asinine feast of sow-thistles and brambles." John Hall, himself a teacher at Cambridge, maintained that the advancement of learning was thwarted by incompetent teachers teaching out-moded subjects. But such voices were for the most part unheeded, and what they said was scarcely understood. Even Leibnitz opposed academic freedom, and Hobbes thought the chief use of universities was to teach subjects their duty to the king. So much was this the prevailing idea that even Hartlib, friend of Milton and Comenius, and himself a reformer, held it without being aware that he did so. "The readiest way," he said, "to reform church and commonwealth is to reform the schools therein."¹ * No doubt; but he differed from Hobbes only in his conclusion. The premise of both was the same; namely, that teaching and learning, so far from being free, should be subordinated to political ends.

This totalitarian conception of schools and universities was brought to the new world by the first settlers. The unexamined assumption that made it acceptable to them was that learning is

* The author's notes, numbered consecutively throughout each of the six Lectures, are all assembled at the end of the book (References and Notes, p. 219).

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essentially dangerous; and they were aware that, so far as schools and universities were concerned, the danger could be met in one of two ways, either by not having any schools or by preventing them from teaching any but familiar and accepted ideas. William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia, preferred the first way. "Thank God there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience and heresy . . . into the world, and printing has divulged them. . . . God keep us from both." ² But generally speaking, in Virginia as well as in the other colonies, the first settlers, being either less pessimistic or more courageous than Governor Berkeley, preferred the second way. They believed that the danger inherent in learning could best be met by schools teaching, under proper control, the right things—the mechanic arts, the learned tongues, and Christian philosophy.

Schools in this sense were perhaps more necessary in New England than elsewhere, because there the first settlers came with the deliberate intention of establishing, as Winthrop said, "a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical." What this due form of government was, the leaders knew with great certainty, and they took care accordingly that their followers should be like-minded men—the "sifted wheat" for the new planting. Yet in spite of every precaution unlike-minded men were found among them. "Many untoward servants," says William Bradford, "were brought over"; parents in England were glad to be rid of children that "would necessarily follow their dissolute courses"; ship masters, making a business of transporting settlers, "to advance their profit, cared not who the persons were, so they had money to pay them"; and so, the kindly governor ends on a plaintive note, "the country became pestered with many unworthy persons, who, being come over, crept into one place or other." ³ Besides, even like-minded men were apt to turn perverse. There was Roger Williams, who believed in soul-liberty, and even went so far as to say that the land belonged to the Indians. There was that "anciently religious woman," Deborah

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Moodie, who cavilled at infant baptism; and Mistress Anne Hutchinson, who, "speaking from the mere motion of the spirit," criticised the ministers for preaching a covenant of works. Obviously, having no schools or printing would not meet the danger inherent in learning, since the Devil was always around to mislead the people anyway.

Of this profound truth the founders of Massachusetts Bay were well aware. Accordingly, the General Court enacted a law to the effect that, "it being one of the chief projects of that old deluder Satan to keep men from a knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these later times by persuading from the use of tongues," there should be established a free school in each town in the province.⁴ This was in 1642. In the same year Harvard College held its first Commencement, graduating nine men. If we may go by the printed rules of the College, these nine men had been instructed, intermittently and superficially, in Logic, Mathematics, Physics, Politics, Rhetoric, Moral Philosophy, Divinity, History, and the nature of plants; and, more constantly and thoroughly, in those tongues (Greek and Latin) in which the old deluder Satan wished to keep the Scriptures hidden. But the chief aim, apart from which all this learning was a vain thing, was that every student should be "plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies, . . . to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life." To this end every student was required to "exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice daily"; and "if in anything they doubt, they shall enquire as of their fellows, so (in case of non-satisfaction) modestly of their Tutors."⁵ What the tutors should do if in anything they doubted, the rules do not say; but it is recorded that in 1654 President Dunster, having doubted the doctrine of infant baptism, was admonished on Lecture Day, and forced to resign his office.

Harvard College was founded to promote learning, but not quite in the sense understood by Abelard, one of the founders of the Uni-

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versity of Paris in the twelfth century. "By doubting," said Abelard, "we are led to questioning, and by questioning we arrive at truth." At Harvard College, in the seventeenth century, doubt was evidently regarded as the chief obstacle to learning. There the rule was: by doubting we run into error, we arrive at truth by enquiring, modestly, of the tutors.

Until the eighteenth century Harvard College was rather a promise than a performance. For lack of funds there were few tutors for the fifteen or twenty students to enquire modestly of; and there was no professor at all until 1721. At that time two other colleges were in existence—William and Mary, founded in 1693, and the Collegiate College, a kind of wandering academy that finally, in 1716, consented to settle down at New Haven, and that was incorporated, in 1745, as Yale College. During the next twenty-five years six other colleges were founded—Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, King's (Columbia) College, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth. In the eighteenth century the due form of government had become rather more civil than ecclesiastical, and the colleges had in some measure responded to this change. But in the eighteenth no less than in the seventeenth century, the colleges were supported by the ruling classes (a flexible, mixed aristocracy, composed of the educated and wealthy families who thought of themselves as "the better sort") in order to provide the leaders of the community with a liberal education; and it was taken for granted that a liberal education would safeguard them against subversive political ideas, and fortify their faith, if not in the tenets of any particular sect, at least in what the Prospectus of King's College called "the Great Principles of Christianity and Morality in which all true Christians in each of the denominations are generally agreed." ⁶ Certainly nothing was further from the intention of the founders of these institutions than that their most distinguished alumni should become the leaders of a revolution dedicated to the principle that all men are endowed by their Creator with an inalienable right to abolish any form of government, civil or ecclesi-

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astical, which did not in their opinion derive its authority from the consent of the governed. Yet this is what came to pass; and if we ask where Jefferson, the brace of Adamses, and their confreres got these subversive ideas, the answer is that they got them in part in college, by reading works in those tongues in which, according to the founders of Massachusetts Bay, the old deluder Satan had hidden the Scriptures.

To establish centers of learning on the assumption that, properly supervised, no subversive ideas will be generated in them is to take a great risk. The founders of the first American colleges took that risk. They were intelligent and courageous men, but in subtilty and resourcefulness they were no match for the old deluder whom they were out to circumvent. Their fatal error, I suspect, was to suppose that the old deluder wished to keep men from a knowledge of the Scriptures, either by hiding them in an unknown tongue or by persuading from the use of tongues. Certainly he must have known that to read the Scriptures is to become acquainted with various and sundry ideas, forms of government, idolatries, moralities, and with every species of pessimism and the most devastating doubt. If he did indeed have anything to do with recording the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, it must have been for another purpose than to keep them hidden. His purpose must have been (this is only my private opinion) to have the boys of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton exposed to Tully, and such-like classical authors, so that they might become infected with the most ingenious ideas and plausible sophistries ever invented to bedevil the minds of men and beguile them into disobedience and heresy.

That the old deluder had really anything to do with all this I do not affirm as a fact: I only refer you, as a good historian should, to the authentic official documents. But it is a fact that Jefferson, the brace of Adamses, and many other leaders of the American Revolution attended one or other of the colleges and there learned to read and prize the classical authors. They read the Scriptures too, no doubt, but they seem to have liked the pagan better than the Chris-

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tian writers—preferring Demosthenes to Deuteronomy; Cicero to Solomon and St. Augustine; Plutarch and Livy to Eusebius or Orosius. Reading the pagan authors, they found the content more interesting than the grammar, no doubt because the content confirmed them in the notion, already current in the eighteenth century, that history and politics were both more interesting and more relevant than theology. The experience of young John Adams was more or less typical. While studying in Harvard College he failed to find in the Scriptures any precept “requiring . . . creeds, confessions, oaths, subscriptions, and whole cart-loads of trumpery that we find religion encumbered with these days.” Concluding, therefore, that “the design of Christianity was not to make . . . good mystery-mongers, but good men, good magistrates, and good subjects,” he was drawn to “that science by which mankind have raised themselves from the . . . state in which nature leaves them, to the full enjoyment of the social union.”⁷

In classical literature Adams and his fellows found an engaging if not entirely true account of what the social union was in ancient Greece and Rome, and took it as in some sense a model of what the social union should be in modern times. Reading the classical authors they learned to admire the fortitude and civic virtues of the republican heroes of that time—the Spartans who died with Leonidas at Thermopylae, the Athenians who stood at Marathon, Brutus who drove out the Tarquins, Regulus who returned to Carthage, and that other Brutus, noblest Roman of them all, who from pure love of freedom struck Caesar down in the Senate house. Admiring the ancient republican heroes, it seemed to them that the golden age of freedom and enlightenment had ended when Caesar crossed the Rubicon, to be followed by a thousand years of despotism and superstition. But from this long Dark Age the world was in their own time emerging, the eternal struggle against tyranny was again the central issue, and in resisting the unwarranted measures of the British government were they not themselves standing at Armageddon? What better then could honest men do than to

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cultivate the civic virtues of the ancient republican heroes, each in his own way becoming a latter-day Valerius or Poplicola? John Adams, elected a delegate to the First Continental Congress, had his eye on Demosthenes. "When Demosthenes (God forgive me for recollecting his example) went ambassador from Athens to the other states of Greece, to excite a confederacy against Phillip, he did not go to propose a Non-Importation or Non-Consumption agreement!!!"⁸ Doubting whether even non-intercourse measures, then regarded as radical, were radical enough for a true patriot, John Adams did not enquire modestly of the tutors. He enquired, none too modestly, of Demosthenes.

So long as Adams and his compatriots were concerned only to defend, against British legislation, the rights of British subjects, it was enough to rest their case on precedent, and to fortify their courage by recalling the virtues of the ancient republican heroes. But resistance to British measures presently involved them in war with the mother country, and war imposed upon them the hard necessity of declaring that the colonies "are and of right ought to be free and independent states." But by what right? The rights of British subjects were not sufficient to justify rebellion. To justify rebellion it was necessary to invoke a more inclusive principle than the rights of British subjects; and this more inclusive principle was found, not in precedent, nor yet in the traditional Christian philosophy of man's origin and destiny, but in the revolutionary doctrine of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man.

The American republic was thus founded on a revolutionary political philosophy—a fact of profound significance for the history of life and learning in the United States. Since the sixteenth century the advancement of learning in Europe had been a difficult business. It was carried on for the most part by scholars who were often excluded from the colleges and universities, and often proscribed by governments, because the doctrine of natural law and right reason which they accepted as the first premise in the search for truth was ostensibly at war with the Christian story of man's origin

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and destiny which the community accepted as the necessary foundation of morality and public authority. But in the eighteenth century, for the first time since the Middle Ages, the principles officially affirmed as the foundation of civil government were coming to be identified, and in the American and French Revolutions were identified, with the premises accepted by scholars as essential to the advancement of knowledge.

In the eighteenth century, therefore, as one may say, established political philosophy and current science made a marriage of convenience. Both accepted the doctrine of natural law as God's revelation to men; both were committed to the theory that the nature of man and the institutions best suited to his happiness and welfare, so far from being divinely revealed in sacred scripture, and to be authoritatively interpreted and enforced by church and state, could only be progressively discovered by man himself through the free application of reason to experience and available knowledge. In so far as political philosophy was translated into practice, the constituted authorities were, therefore, obligated to guarantee freedom of opinion, and to regard colleges and universities as centers for the increase of knowledge rather than merely for the preservation and transmission of familiar and accepted ideas. In such institutions the rule would then presumably be that if pupils or professors in anything doubted they would consult, modestly or not (that was their affair), not the tutors, not the clergy or the magistrates, or even the "Great Principles of Christianity and Morality in which all true Christians are generally agreed," but the best right reason available to intelligent men.

Marriages of convenience, as is well known, are rarely entirely happy. The doctrine of natural law and right reason, however useful for effecting a separation from Great Britain, did little to dislodge from the minds of average men faith in the traditional Christian story of man's origin and destiny. For this reason the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment were less generally accepted, and their implications for education less well understood, among the mass

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of the people than among the political leaders, among the administrators than among the distinguished alumni of the colleges; and I need scarcely say that ingrained habits and settled ideas of professors were not all at once transformed by the doctrines enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Nevertheless, before and during the American Revolution we can note the beginnings of such a transformation—the beginnings of those social and intellectual influences that were, during the course of another century, to bring about a liberal and democratic transformation of higher education in the United States.

Long before the middle of the eighteenth century Professor Samuel Johnson found in the Yale College Library copies of Newton's *Principia* and Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*; and from these and other works of similar import he discovered that mathematics and physics were instruments of vast importance for interpreting the ways of God to man: reading Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, he said, was an experience like that "of a person suddenly emerging from a glimmer of twilight into the full sunshine of day."⁹ In subsequent years Samuel Johnson became so well known for his interest in the natural sciences that he was called to be the first President of King's College in New York. According to the Prospectus of 1754, which he himself drafted, the college would provide instruction, not only in mathematics and the classical languages, but also in the arts of "surveying and navigation, of geography and history, of husbandry, commerce, and government, and in the knowledge of all nature in the heavens above us, and in the air, water, and earth around us . . . and of everything useful for the comfort, the convenience and elegance of life, in the chief manufactures relating to any of these things"—all to the end of leading students "from the study of nature to the knowledge of themselves, and of the God of nature, and their duty to Him, themselves, and one another."¹⁰ This ambitious project, expressing so well the sentiments of an eighteenth-century *philosophe*, was apparently not very cordially received by the faculty, and was at all events aban-

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done altogether when President Johnson retired in 1762; but in 1785 the curriculum of the college (Columbia as it was then called) was again revised to include the natural sciences, navigation, the rise and progress of language, "history and chronology as low as the fall of the Roman Empire," and the origin, extent, power, commerce, religion and customs of the principal kingdoms of the world.¹¹

The founding of the University of Pennsylvania may be regarded (for our purpose, although not perhaps for the purpose of a loyal alumnus of that institution) as the result of a movement started by the publication, in 1749, of Benjamin Franklin's pamphlet on the education of youth in Pennsylvania. Franklin maintained that the time spent on the study of Greek and Latin might be better spent on the study of more practical subjects, since for the majority of young men, "in such a country as ours," a practical education would be more useful.¹² Money was raised, within a few years an academy was founded, and in 1756 the first Provost of this institution, later known as the University of Pennsylvania, was appointed. The man selected was the Rev. William Smith, one of several citizens of New York who had been much interested in the founding of King's College two years before, and had approved of the liberal ideas of its first president.¹³ Under the direction of William Smith the University of Pennsylvania offered a course of study that conformed in many respects to the ideas of Samuel Johnson and Benjamin Franklin; and for many years that university was the most advanced of American colleges in the emphasis it placed on the natural sciences, politics and history, and the modern languages.¹⁴

No one in the eighteenth century advocated more novel measures for reforming higher education than Thomas Jefferson, and in 1779 his prestige in Virginia was sufficient to effect a complete reorganization of William and Mary College. Knowledge of the classical languages was no longer required for entrance. Students were free to elect any courses in any order, and to come up for their degrees when they thought themselves sufficiently prepared to pass

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the examinations. New professorships were established in law and politics, in anatomy and medicine, in natural philosophy and the modern languages; and the chair of divinity was abolished because, as James Madison informed President Stiles of Yale, "an establishment in favor of any particular sect was thought to be incompatible with the freedom of a republic." ¹⁵

Other colleges were less influenced by the liberal ideas of the time. If in some of them more attention was given to history and the natural sciences, it was less because of changes in the curriculum than because some or other professor happened to be interested in these subjects. Under President Leverett, according to Professor S. E. Morison, the liberal tradition was established at Harvard, which means that Harvard was "kept a house of learning under the spirit of religion, not, as the Mathers and their kind would have had it, the divinity school of a particular sect." The liberal tradition at least permitted the first Hollis Professor, Isaac Greenwood, to promote interest in the natural sciences, very much as Samuel Johnson did at Yale, by "giving lectures with demonstrations 'of the discoveries of the incomparable Sir Isaac Newton.'" ¹⁶ After 1735 French was intermittently taught at Harvard, but as late as 1814 George Ticknor could only with difficulty find a German dictionary or grammar in the Boston book shops or the college library. ¹⁷

These were tentative beginnings in the liberal spirit of the Enlightenment; but the liberal movement, even in the colleges of William and Mary, Columbia, and the University of Pennsylvania, had largely spent its force before the end of the century. This was partly because the revolutionary war had weakened and impoverished the colleges as well as the country; but chiefly because the revolutionary upheaval, especially in France, had discredited the liberal philosophy of the pre-revolutionary period. At the opening of the nineteenth century the educated and governing classes, both in Europe and America, were in a mood to regard the word "revolution" as synonymous with the word "Jacobinism," and "Jacobinism" was for them much the same thing as political and moral

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anarchy. Mr. Thomas Paine, once highly respected as the author of *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, was suddenly transformed, by the publication of *The Age of Reason*, into "old Tom Paine the free thinker." Even the author of the Declaration of Independence was fallen from his former high estate. In the North he was vilified as little better than an agent of international Jacobinism; while in the South his religious ideas were deplored, and explained on the convenient hypothesis that in his youth, most unfortunately, he had been led astray by the atheistical French writers.

This reversion to timidity in the community was equally pronounced in the colleges—perhaps even more pronounced in the colleges, since they were the guardians of youth. The fact may be symbolized by the contrast, in temper and outlook, between two presidents of Yale College: Ezra Stiles (1777-1795) and his successor Timothy Dwight (1795-1817). The genial curiosity and catholic sympathies of Ezra Stiles, always disposing him to try anything once, enabled him to smuggle into fixed classical courses much enlightening discussion of history, law and politics; and into a course on ecclesiastical history at least one lecture on ventriloquism.¹⁸ Timothy Dwight, a man of vast learning, incredible energy, and skill as a teacher and administrator, is one of the heroic figures in the history of Yale College. That he did much for Yale College may be readily admitted. He obtained money for the college, enriched its library, enforced discipline, converted the students, made them study and like it, and even appointed Benjamin Silliman as Professor of Chemistry—something that we can hardly suppose he would have done could he have foreseen that the study of natural science would undermine religion as he understood it.¹⁹ He did much to toughen the body of Yale College, but singularly little to enrich its spirit; for when all is said it must be said that he devoted his great learning and dynamic energy to the Canute-like enterprise of commanding the swelling tide of liberal thought to recede. As president and teacher his principal concern seems to have been to keep the students undefiled by the dangerous political ideas of

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Thomas Jefferson, and the still more dangerous intellectual and religious ideas of the most distinguished writers of the eighteenth century. One of his notable efforts was the Baccalaureate address to the class of 1797: not one but two long sermons on *The Danger of Infidel Philosophy*. The infidels refuted were, among others, Shaftesbury, Hobbes, Bolingbroke, Hume, Voltaire, and Diderot. The argument refuting them was elaborate, uninspired, and notable for the careless distribution of undistributed middles throughout. The two sermons were sufficiently approved at the time to be printed and widely read but in retrospect one can only regard them as a pathetic, if valiant effort to make Yale College one of the homes of lost causes.

Not that Yale was any more the home of a lost cause than other colleges. In 1820 the curriculum of Columbia was no more liberal than it had been in 1786, while that of the University of Pennsylvania was less liberal than the one devised by its first Provost in 1756. By 1820, or thereabouts, and for half a century thereafter, all of the leading colleges, with the exception of the University of Virginia in so far as it conformed to Jefferson's plan, were so much alike, so standardized and set in respect to personnel, methods of instruction, and course of study, that no one but a loyal alumnus could easily distinguish one from another.

The course of study consisted of a thorough four-years' drill in the classical languages, supplemented by a little superficial instruction in natural science, history and politics, and modern literature. A few professors (such as Ticknor at Harvard, Silliman at Yale, and Lieber at South Carolina) gave stimulating lectures in the class room; but to hear a lecture by a distinguished scholar or man of letters the students had for the most part to go outside the college to the town Lyceum. Inside the college they prepared and recited the daily lesson. They were rarely invited to examine the content of any classical author, much less any, such as Plato or Lucretius, whose ideas might have led them in something to doubt by arousing them to unaccustomed thought. They received a good

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mark each day if they had learned the vocabulary and mastered the grammar of the assigned passage, or could turn into respectable Latin some respectable passage of English prose. They learned history and modern literature by memorizing each day, more or less verbatim, four or five pages of the prescribed textbook. In mental and moral philosophy the chief thing was to master the fine distinction between the ordinary, the primary, the predominant, and the primary-predominant choices of the will—choices which, if right, made the man right, here and hereafter. "Mr. Blank," said Professor Parks to a supposedly obtuse Dartmouth student, "if Peter had died when he was cursing and swearing, where would he have gone?" "Gone to Heaven, sir." "Doubtless, but how would he have gotten there?" "Got there on his primary-predominant." The student was not so obtuse after all, since his answer, being the right one, satisfied the professor.²⁰

College faculties were composed, with some notable exceptions, of men who were entirely competent to teach by this method, since they had suffered an extremely competent training in it. Some of them were learned men, attending diligently to *hoti's* business; some, learned or not, were best known for personal eccentricity; and virtually all were cultivated and well informed men of unquestioned integrity and genuine devotion to their profession. If there were not among them as many uneducated specialists as may be found on faculties today, neither were there as many really original minds. Rarely troubled by doubt, and always disposed to rely on the recognized authorities, their chief distinction was to know and to enforce all of the right answers rather than to know or to ask any of the right questions. "I would rather have ten settled opinions, and nine of them wrong," Professor Taylor of Yale was accustomed to say, "than to be like my brother Gibbs with none of the ten settled." The attitude was typical at a time when, according to the younger Timothy Dwight, "the idea was so widespread and all-controlling that the teacher's work was . . . to bring Cicero into adjustment with Andrews and Stoddard's grammar, that no

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one, however free and gifted, could make it his great effort to put Andrews and Stoddard in accord with Cicero.”²¹ Boldness was not indeed the primary-predominant choice of professors in those days. But, lacking originality, they could be dogmatic; and there was no great danger of their being admonished on Lecture Day, since, for them, all of the really vital questions had been settled, and for every emergency (in the class room, in the market place or the political forum, in polite conversation or serious discourse) their minds were furnished with an ample supply of Latin tags to see them triumphantly through to the prejudged conclusion.

Anchored in the classics and stayed by authority, college faculties were for the most part impervious to the rising demand for more thorough study of natural science, history, and modern literature. Brander Matthews said that as late as his time in Columbia but one term was given to English literature, and that he was not introduced to any English author or told to read any. Henry Cabot Lodge said that at Harvard he “never had his mind roused to . . . anything resembling active thought”—except, he added, in Henry Adams’s course in Mediaeval history. For fifteen years Benjamin Silliman, the most distinguished and best loved member of the Yale faculty, worked in a damp, ill-lighted underground laboratory, which he could enter only by backing down a ladder through a trap door; and he used to say that when he went to Philadelphia to lecture he carried all of Yale’s geological specimens with him in a candle box. At Princeton instruction in natural science was more perfunctory and less competent than it had been in the eighteenth century under President Witherspoon. The scientific specimens were too bulky to be taken to Philadelphia (supposing that any one at Princeton had wanted to go to Philadelphia) in a candle box; but James McCosh, when inaugurated as president in 1868, pronounced them all fit only to be burnt.²² Natural science made its way in the medical schools, through the Smithsonian Institution, and in special schools such as the Rensselaer Institute and the Lawrence and Sheffield schools at Harvard and Yale. But such schools

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were regarded by the college proper as not quite out of the top drawer. In the eighteen-fifties Andrew D. White spent three years at Yale without being more than vaguely aware that "Sheff" was a part of it; and one day, watching through the dusty window of an unfamiliar building some fellow manipulating a test tube, he wondered how any one could interest himself in such matters.

The lost cause, so explicitly defined and ably defended by the famous and influential Yale Report of 1828, was not the small college, still less the study of the classical languages and literature. The cause that was lost was the traditional conception, deriving with slight modification from the seventeenth century, of the purpose of learning and the function of colleges in the community. According to that conception, the function of such institutions was to preserve and transmit rather than to increase knowledge; and more especially to prepare a select group of young men, taken for the most part from the educated and governing classes, for the learned professions by giving them a limited command of the classical tongues, and transmitting to them the factual knowledge and ideas about man and the world in which he lived that would lend support to the political institutions, the moral habits, and the religious convictions acceptable to the best progressive-conservative thought of the time. The end desired, as the Yale Report said, was the disciplined and informed mind; but a mind disciplined to conformity and informed with nothing that a patriotic, Christian, and clubable gentleman had better not know.²⁸

For half a century opposition to this conception of higher education became more widespread and insistent. The opposition was inspired by different motives, supported by different classes of people, and directed to different ends. An increasing number of scholars (foreign born and trained, or Americans returning from study abroad) were primarily interested in expanding the American college into centers of research and publication on the model of the best German and French universities. Others were primarily interested in liberalizing the course of study in the college itself, by giv-

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ing more time and attention, as the Amherst Report of 1827 suggested, to "the modern languages, history, civil and constitutional law," and those physical sciences that "have a practical application to the useful arts and trades." ²⁴

But far more important than these limited demands for reform was the growing conviction, among the people throughout the country, that the older colleges were "undemocratic," and in any case unsuited to the needs of an industrial and agricultural community. As early as 1830 the workers of Philadelphia declared "that there can be no freedom without a wide diffusion of intelligence; that the members of a Republic should all be instructed alike in the nature of their rights and duties as human beings, and as citizens; . . . that until means of equal instruction shall be equally secured to all, liberty is an unmeaning word, and equality an empty shadow." ²⁵ The idea is more explicitly expressed in the constitutions of many of the newer states, and nowhere better than in the constitution of Indiana, adopted in 1816: "It shall be the duty of the General Assembly, as soon as circumstances will permit, to provide by law for a general system of education, ascending in a regular gradation from township schools to state university, wherein tuition shall be gratis, and equally open to all." These are but two examples, out of innumerable ones that might be given, of the widespread conviction that in a country, as Franklin said, "such as ours" (a great, sprawling, sparsely settled country, whose people were committed to the principle of equality and largely engaged in agricultural and industrial pursuits), what was needed was a system of education that would enable the ordinary citizen, at slight cost or at public expense, to prepare himself for the practical occupations and to assume the political obligations of free men in a democratic society.

The concrete result of this widespread dissatisfaction with the older colleges was the multiplication of colleges and the establishment of state universities, especially in the newly settled and more remote sections of the country. But for many years most of these

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institutions were poorly endowed and incompetently staffed; and if it were necessary to fix a date when the general demand for educational reform began to win notable victories all along the line, the year 1865, when Governor Fenton signed the charter for Cornell University, would serve as well as any other. During the last quarter of the century, at all events, there occurred a striking expansion and transformation of the colleges and universities throughout the country. The most obvious change was quantitative—more students and professors, more and larger buildings, more and more varied equipment, more books in libraries, and endowments rising to heights never before dreamed of. Equally obvious was the rapid liberalization of the curriculum, and the adoption of the elective system in place of the fixed, required course of study. Less obvious, but more significant, was the expansion of a few state universities and some of the old colleges into universities properly so called—institutions that included—besides the college of liberal arts—professional schools, and graduate schools for the promotion of scientific research and publication in all branches of knowledge. Most significant of all was the fact that the best colleges and universities, accepting frankly the principle of freedom of learning and teaching, were able to find a place for those exceptional individuals whose function it is to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and thus to become, what the best European universities already were, centers for the promotion as well as for the preservation and transmission of human learning.

In this educational renaissance Cornell University played its part, and that not an insignificant one. Better than any other institution it may be said to have represented, in its organization and in its aims, all of the dominant trends of the time. Located neither in the old East nor in the newer West, it was shaped by the interests and currents of opinion that prevailed in both regions. It was not altogether a state university, like those of Michigan and Illinois, or altogether a privately endowed university, like Harvard and Yale, but a curious combination of both. It managed, with great ingenu-

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ity, to obtain munificent gifts from private individuals while holding lands granted by the federal government for a rise in price, and then to induce the state legislature to make additional and substantial appropriations for its support. It was founded by a shrewd, hard-headed farmer and business man with a practical outlook and a Quaker conscience, and organized by a Michigan professor of history who had graduated from Yale and was familiar at first hand with European universities; and as a result of their united efforts it was deliberately designed to meet the three cardinal demands of the time—the demand for a liberalization of the college of arts, for the promotion of scientific research, and for advanced professional training in agriculture and the mechanic arts.

The event that led directly to the establishment of this representative institution is connected with the demand for schools of agriculture and the mechanic arts. In a country so predominantly agricultural, and possessing immense stretches of free land, it was inevitable that the people should request the federal government to set aside a part of the public domain for the endowment of agricultural education. The most important response to this demand was the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862; and so far as New York State is concerned Cornell University was the direct result of the Morrill Act. In the next lecture I shall deal with the origin and nature of the Morrill Act.

II

The Morrill Land Grant College Act

The one class have schools, seminaries, colleges, universities, apparatus, professors . . . for educating them . . . for the peculiar profession which is the business of their life; and they have already created, each class for its own use, a vast and voluminous literature, that would well nigh sink a whole navy of ships. But where are the universities, the apparatus, the professors and the literature, specifically adapted to any one of the industrial classes? Echo answers, where?

JONATHAN B. TURNER

FEW things give historians more deep satisfaction, spiced as it is with a trace of malice, than to dig up evidence to prove that this or that celebrated document, until then supposed by every one to have been the work of some well known and honorable man, was really the work of some other fellow whom no one ever heard of before. It is because of this that I have to ask the question: Who was the originator of the so-called Morrill land grant college plan (until the point is determined it will be well to call it the so-called Morrill plan), and who was the author of the bill by which it was enacted into law? Not that it really matters very much, of course. But all the same, the question has been much and ardently debated; and since the honor of sovereign states is involved, and the right to wear laurels is at stake, I think we have a right to know what has been going on behind the scenes.

As every one knows (this is the lecturer's friendly way of calling the attention of his listeners to something he supposes they don't know)—as every one knows, the so-called Morrill Act provided for a federal grant of public land to each of the states as an endowment

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for education in agriculture and the mechanic arts. And as every one knows, the act became a law on July 2, 1862. But perhaps every one does not know that some years later, when it became a distinct merit to have had something to do with the famous act, Senator Morrill (as he then was) said that the phraseology of the act was wholly his own; and he intimated that the plan itself was wholly his own too. "I do not remember," he said in 1894, "of any assistance in framing the bill prior to its introduction." And again: "Where I obtained the first hint of such a measure, I am wholly unable to say."¹ But he as good as said that the measure was essentially the result of his own personal experience (that of a poor boy, the son of a village blacksmith), and of pure excogitation on his part. Thus Senator Morrill, after a lapse of years, gave the world to understand that he was the sole originator and author of the so-called Morrill Land Grant College Act. What more then do we want?

Well, in due course there were bound to be inquisitive historians who wanted a good deal more. They wanted to know whether, after a lapse of years, Senator Morrill hadn't forgotten some things. Had he not perhaps forgotten that in 1848, as a trustee of Norwich College, he was associated with its founder, Alden Partridge, and must have learned from him that many men throughout the country were discussing the need of agricultural colleges and the possibility of endowing them by grants of land from the public domain? More particularly, had he not forgotten that in 1856, the year before the so-called Morrill Act was first introduced in Congress, he was himself a delegate to the meeting of the United States Agricultural Society, and must at that time have heard the delegates discuss at length a specific plan for establishing an agricultural university in each state in the union, and for endowing each university with a federal land grant of a value not less than five hundred thousand dollars? This plan certainly did not originate with Mr. Morrill. It was drafted and promoted by Jonathan B. Turner, a professor in Illinois College; and those who are concerned for the honor of

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Illinois say that this plan was the original form of the so-called Morrill Act. They say that the bill was not introduced by an Illinois congressman because Professor Turner and his friends thought it would have a better chance if introduced and sponsored by the representatives of some eastern state. They even say that Professor Turner and his friends requested Mr. Morrill to introduce the measure, turned over to him all of their documents relating to it, and, generally speaking, employed him as front man and mouth-piece for getting their plan enacted into law. And then, they say, the mere introducer of the bill got all the credit, whereas the laurels, such as they are, should rightfully be worn by Jonathan B. Turner of Illinois.²

So they say. And there is a good deal in what they say, but not, after all, as much as they would like us to think. I can well believe that Senator Morrill was unable, not only after a lapse of years but at any time, to say where he got the first hint for his bill. I doubt whether Professor Turner would have been any better able to say where he got the first hint for his plan. It was not a question of anything so illusive as hints. When the so-called Morrill Act was first introduced in Congress in 1857 the idea and the practice of endowing schools by federal land grants was a commonplace. It had by then become the settled policy of the federal government to set aside, in each state as it was admitted to the union, a part of the public domain for the support of education in that state. More than sixty million acres had already been set aside for the support of common schools; and four million acres had already been granted to fifteen states for the endowment of state universities. If any one needed a "first hint" for a plan essentially similar to the so-called Morrill Act, here were hints in God's plenty. Strictly speaking, no one originated the so-called Morrill Act. It was an obvious adaptation of ideas widely current and of practices long established. And for this reason, and because it is customary to attach to a law the name of the man who introduced it in Congress, we shall do no

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great violence to historic truth if we now revert to the established practice, and henceforth call the so-called Morrill Act the Morrill Act.

Let us not fail, however, to give all due credit to Jonathan B. Turner and Illinois. For some fifteen years prior to the introduction of the Morrill Act there had been a more or less active movement for the establishment of agricultural colleges. The movement was not started, nor much supported, by the farmers themselves. "The great and insuperable trouble," said James B. Angell, writing as late as 1869, "is to inspire farmers with the belief that science has anything to offer them."⁸ But there were prominent men in most states (more especially in New York and Massachusetts, in Michigan and Illinois) who realized that science had much to offer the farmers. They were acquainted with recent advances made, chiefly in Europe, in the chemical and biological sciences; they knew that in the older communities the farms were being exhausted, and in the newer communities wastefully cultivated; and they believed that science could do much to improve the quality of the farms and advance the profits of the farmers, if only the farmers themselves could be sufficiently educated to understand their own business. They were convinced, therefore, that an agricultural college in each state would serve a double purpose: it would be a center for advancing the science of agriculture, and for teaching the farmers how to make a practical application of that science.

By no one was this program urged with more persistence, or with more picturesque volubility, than by Professor Jonathan B. Turner of Illinois College. Some of the leaders of the movement believed that the need could be adequately met by establishing courses in agriculture and the mechanic arts in the older colleges; and certain colleges had done something in that way. But Professor Turner soon became convinced that all such efforts would fail. The old colleges, he said, "have hauled a canoe alongside their huge professional steamships and invited the farmers and mechanics to jump on board and sail with them; but the difficulty is, they will

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not embark." His own ideas were first clearly formulated in an address delivered before a convention of farmers at Granville, Illinois, on November 18, 1851; and this address, afterwards published and widely circulated, contained most of the suggestions in what came to be known as the "Turner Plan."⁴

Professor Turner began his address by pointing out that the professional classes already had "colleges, universities, apparatus, professors . . . for educating them . . . for the peculiar profession which is the business of their life; and they have already created, each class for its own use, a vast and voluminous literature, that would well nigh sink a whole navy of ships. But where are the universities, the apparatus, the professors and the literature, specifically adapted to any one of the industrial classes? Echo answers, where?" To fill this empty, rhetorical "where," Professor Turner presented his plan—a plan that was perhaps a bit visionary, but not lacking in vision and imagination for all that. There should be, he thought, and potentially there already was in the Smithsonian Institution, a central directing organization at Washington. What was lacking was a national hook-up of this central organization with a network of institutions throughout the country—that is to say, "a university for the industrial classes in each of the states, with their consequent subordinate institutions, lyceums, and high schools in each of the counties and towns."

Professor Turner then went on to describe in much detail the kind of university he had in mind—an industrial university with its specially trained professors, its specialized library, its laboratories for conducting experiments in all the relevant scientific fields, and of course its model farm to demonstrate the advantages, to farmers and to the community as a whole, of husbandry conducted in a scientific manner. The central purpose of his entire plan was to make the university an integral part of the life of the community, a fact which might well be played up a good deal at Commencement time. Commencement exercises should be, Professor Turner thought, in the nature of an annual fair, lasting several days, dur-

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ing which agricultural products from all parts of the state would be exhibited, and prizes awarded for the best specimens of every sort. And maybe (Professor Turner does not say, but I would not put it past him) horse races, and contests with horseshoes to see who could throw the most ringers. In short, a glorified state fair conducted by the university on a scientific basis, and with an Arcadian simplicity and expansiveness—the spirit of ancient Olympian games reborn in the Illinois cornfields!

But the endowment for these universities—what of that? In his Granville address Professor Turner said that, so far as Illinois was concerned, the lands already granted to the state, if not diverted to other purposes, were “amply sufficient.” Very shortly, however, he and his friends were urging something more than that; and on February 8, 1853, the Illinois legislature adopted a resolution that may have been drafted by Professor Turner and his friends, and at any rate expressed their ideas on the subject. The resolution directed the Illinois representatives in Congress to work, in cooperation with representatives of other states, for “a law of Congress donating to each state in the Union an amount of land, not less in value than \$500,000, for the liberal endowment of a system of industrial universities, one in each state in the Union, to cooperate with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, for the more liberal and practical education of the industrial classes and their teachers; a liberal and varied education adapted to the needs of a practical and enterprising people.”⁶ This resolution may be taken to be the Turner Plan in its final and essential form; and in the same year Professor Turner and his friends organized “the Industrial League” to obtain support for it in Congress and throughout the country.

The first step, obviously, was to prepare a bill for congressional action. In 1854, at the request of Representative Yates of Illinois, Professor Turner himself drafted such a bill and sent it on; but for various reasons it was not thought advisable to introduce it at that time. In 1857 the circumstances seemed more favorable, and in October of that year Professor Turner wrote to Senator Trumbull

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suggesting that the bill be introduced by the Illinois representatives at the coming session. In reply, Senator Trumbull said that he would gladly support such a bill—so much land at the disposal of Congress was, he thought, a perennial source of patronage and corruption, and the sooner the federal government got rid of the land the better; but, he said, Congress was just then reluctant to make any new grants of land, and particularly so if the request for them came from the western states, since so much of the public domain had already been turned over to those states. For this reason, Senator Trumbull thought, it would be advisable to have the bill introduced and sponsored by the representatives of one of the eastern states.⁶ This was in October, 1857; and two months later Mr. Morrill of Vermont introduced the Morrill bill.

That Mr. Morrill was at that time familiar with the Turner Plan can hardly be doubted. We know that he was a delegate to the meeting of the United States Agricultural Society in 1856, where the Turner Plan was discussed at length. We know that as late as 1856 he was still advocating the establishment of national agricultural colleges on the model of the West Point military academy—something quite different from the colleges contemplated in the Morrill bill. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that in framing the Morrill bill he took over the essential feature of the Turner Plan—that is, the proposal to endow an agricultural college in each state by a federal land grant. But there is no good reason to suppose that Professor Turner asked Mr. Morrill to introduce the Turner bill, or that he turned over to him all of his papers relating to it. This is a claim that was made much later. At this later time there is reference to a "voluminous correspondence" between Professor Turner and Mr. Morrill, the only evidence that such a body of letters ever existed being the assertion that it must have been lost. About all that is extant, at all events, is a brief, formal note from Mr. Morrill, dated December 30, 1861, acknowledging the receipt of a letter from Professor Turner—such a note as a public man of many acquaintances usually writes in reply to a letter from some one whose name,

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he vaguely feels, ought to mean something to him but in fact doesn't.⁷

So far as the crucial years 1857-1859 are concerned there is no contemporary evidence that Professor Turner himself ever claimed, or that any one ever claimed for him, any credit for framing the Morrill bill, or for getting it introduced in Congress. On the other hand, there is a letter from Professor Turner to Senator Trumbull, dated January 4, 1858, which clearly indicates that he had nothing directly to do with the Morrill bill, and was not in any case very well satisfied with it. "I thank you much," he writes, "for copy of the industrial university appropriation bill. I like its main features, but hope it may have *some* amendment. I send by this mail another copy of our reports, thinking you may not have one at hand and may desire to refer to the action of our state."⁸ This, to say the least of it, does not sound like the letter of a man who had asked Mr. Morrill to introduce his bill for him, had turned over all of his papers relating to it, and generally speaking was, with his Illinois friends, standing by watching and directing the whole performance. It is the letter of a man who, two weeks after the Morrill bill was introduced, learns for the first time what the provisions of the bill are, and wonders what, if anything, can be done at that late date to make it conform more closely to his own plan.

However that may be, one thing is certain: the bill actually introduced by Mr. Morrill differed from the Turner Plan in one very important respect, and the difference was highly prejudicial to Illinois. According to the Turner Plan each state was to receive an amount of land equal in value to \$500,000; according to the Morrill bill each state was to receive 20,000 acres (in the final act increased to 30,000) for each senator and representative in Congress to which it was entitled by the preceding census. No wonder Professor Turner hoped the bill "would have *some* amendment," since the difference was by no means a negligible one. It meant, for example, that New York would receive more than twice as much land as Illinois, and approximately one tenth of the entire grant.

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This method of allocating the lands was adopted to win the support of the eastern states. "Many easterners," says Professor Paul Gates, "were now ready to support free homesteads and liberal land grants to railroads in exchange for [western] support for high tariffs, favorable immigration laws, a national banking system, and ship subsidies." ⁹ But they felt that the western states had been granted more than their fair share of the public domain. The provision of the Morrill bill for allocating the lands was thus just an ordinary political bargain—give us a share-plus in the public lands, and we will give you your agricultural colleges.

The people of the West wanted agricultural colleges, but as it turned out were extremely reluctant to pay the price demanded in the Morrill bill. The bill, introduced December 14, 1857, was passed by a bare majority (25-22 in the Senate; 105-100 in the House), and the adverse vote came largely from the South and the West. Vetoed by President Buchanan, February 24, 1859, the bill was reintroduced, with slight modifications, three years later, passed by a larger majority (32-7 in the Senate; 91-25 in the House), and signed by President Lincoln July 2, 1862. As before, the favorable vote came chiefly from the eastern states, the adverse vote chiefly from the western states; and if the adverse vote was greatly reduced, that was because many of the southern states were not then represented in Congress.¹⁰ It seems odd, certainly, that there should have been so much opposition to the Land Grant College Act by the very states that most approved of those provisions that make it seem to us admirable, and that alone have made it famous. The reasons for this opposition need to be understood in order to appreciate certain circumstances connected with the foundation of Cornell University; but in order to understand them we must first have a somewhat detailed knowledge of the act itself.

The Morrill Act has the following title: "An act donating public lands to the several States and Territories which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts." ¹¹ The act is comparatively short, and if I wanted to be accurate at all costs

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I could very well quote the chief passages verbatim. But since I want to make the act intelligible, I will venture, even at the risk of some slight error, to summarize its chief provisions in language that the non-legal mind can understand. To safeguard myself still further, I ought to say that in the course of drafting and passing the bill the framers appear to have suffered a slight attack of amnesia: the title of the act expresses the intention of donating lands to the several territories, but the act itself fails to donate them any.

The Morrill Act provided, first of all, that each state should receive 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative in Congress to which it was entitled by the apportionment of 1860. For this purpose public land was defined as "land subject to sale and private entry at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre"; and if land acquired by any state had, at the time of entry, doubled in value as "a consequence of railroad grants," the number of acres donated to that state should be proportionately reduced. But how were the lands to be transferred to the states? Here a distinction had to be made. Within the limits of some eight western states there was still a sufficient amount of public land to cover the donation to those states. In all such cases, therefore, the land donated to each state was to be selected from the public land within the limits of that state, and the state itself could acquire title to the land and either sell it at once or hold it for a better price.

But in many states (New York for example) there were no public lands at all; in others (Illinois for example) there were still some public lands, but not enough to cover the total donation. For donating lands to these states another method had, therefore, to be adopted. Carefully concealing this important distinction as long as possible, the act ever so casually slips it to the reader in the third clause of a long-winded sentence defining the method of donation: "and the Secretary of the Interior is hereby instructed to issue to each of the states in which there is not the quantity of public lands . . . to which it is entitled . . . land scrip to the amount in acres for the deficiency of its distributive share." Just so. This means, to

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take a concrete example, that New York State, instead of being given title to its share of public lands (989,920 acres), would be given 6,187 pieces of federal government land scrip (each piece good for 160 acres) which could be used by private persons to acquire title to that number of acres of public land in any of the states and territories where there was any.

But why not permit the state itself to use its scrip to acquire title in its own name? Well, it would never do of course to allow one sovereign state to walk in majesty and peace into the domain of another sovereign state and take possession of public lands therein. It could in effect get possession, that was the intention of the act; but it could do it only by indirection. The act therefore further provided: "said scrip to be sold by said States and the proceeds . . . applied to the uses . . . prescribed in this act." To make what was perfectly clear a little clearer the act went on to say: "Provided, that in no case shall any State to which land scrip may thus be issued be allowed to locate the same within the limits of any other State, or Territory." But then, thinking perhaps that a little obscurity would after all be good for the lay mind, the act added: "but their assignees may thus locate said scrip upon any of the unappropriated lands of the United States . . . but not to exceed one million acres in any one State." What is obscure is the meaning of "assignees." If a state sold the scrip to a private person the purchaser would be its assignee; but if, wishing to endow a particular college, it gave its scrip to that college, as Rhode Island gave its scrip to Brown University, would that college be its assignee within the meaning of the act? The act does not say, but the legal mind says not; it says that the clause "said scrip to be sold by said States" is mandatory, so that in giving its scrip to Brown University Rhode Island violated the act. I hope this is clear, or as clear as may be, since it was by the authority of this provision (a somewhat more ingenious and complicated manipulation of the provision than a strict interpretation of the act would seem to warrant) that Cornell University obtained by far the larger part of its endowment.

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We now come to the central and controlling provision of the Morrill Act—the provision defining the purposes for which the lands and scrip were donated to the several states. The act states that all proceeds from the sale of lands or scrip “shall be invested in . . . safe stocks, yielding not less than five percentum upon the par value of said stocks; and moneys so invested shall constitute a perpetual fund . . . the interest of which shall be inviolably appropriated . . . to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life.” And that this purpose might be faithfully fulfilled, certain subsidiary provisions were included. These were: (1) that each state should formally accept the act as a condition of benefiting by it; (2) that if the invested funds were lost or diminished the state concerned should replace the amount; (3) that if any state failed, within five years, to provide “at least not less than one college [admirable phrase!], as described in . . . this act,” it should pay back to the United States all proceeds received from the sale of lands or scrip; and (4) that not more than ten per cent of the proceeds of the sale of lands or scrip should be used to purchase land for experimental farms or sites for college buildings, and that no part of the proceeds or interest should be used for the purchase, erection, or maintenance of any buildings.

Such was the Morrill Land Grant College Act. Land Grant College Act is a proper name for it, since it was, obviously, two distinct measures joined together—a measure for granting public lands, and a measure for endowing colleges. What especially strikes one, in following the debates in Congress, is the singular indifference of the representatives to those educational provisions

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that have made the act famous. Representative Morrill, it is true, defended the first bill on the ground that it was a great educational charter—a measure that would “enable the farmer to raise two blades of grass instead of one” (not a difficult thing to do one would suppose), that would do something for “cheap education,” that would do something for all men “who love intelligence and not ignorance.” Whether he was voicing his own deep conviction, or merely defending his bill at its least vulnerable point, is none too clear. But what is clear is that the Morrill bill, both in its earlier and in its later form, won support or incurred opposition chiefly because of its advantages or disadvantages as a measure for distributing public lands. The eastern states gave the bill very nearly a unanimous support, and their reasons for supporting it were well expressed in a resolution of the New York legislature, in 1858, instructing its representatives not to vote “for any further appropriations of public lands to the newer states until just provisions be made by which the original states shall receive their equitable proportion of said lands.”¹² The Morrill bill gave them what they regarded as their equitable proportion, and they therefore voted for it, less because it gave them colleges than because it gave them lands.

The representatives from the western states were not in a position to vote with much enthusiasm either for or against the act, since they regarded the method of granting the lands as a bad means of obtaining a good end, which was the endowment of agricultural colleges. Those who voted for the measure did so in spite of the bad means; those who voted against it did so in spite of the good ends. The means were bad, they all thought, partly because the eastern states were given more than their proper share of the endowment, but chiefly because the method of granting the lands would open a free field for unscrupulous land speculators, of whose activities they had seen more than enough. The evil was already notorious, especially in Illinois and Iowa, where enormous tracts of land were held by absentee owners for a rise

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in prices. The Homestead Act was the result of a long effort to end this evil by reserving public lands in small farms for actual settlers, and the western states supported it for that reason. How then could they support the Morrill Act, which was so obviously calculated, in effect if not in intention, to defeat the purposes of the Homestead Act? Senator Lane declared that the Morrill Act was "in contradiction to the Homestead proposition," and that it "contained the ruin of the state" of Kansas which he represented. Senator Wilkinson of Minnesota voiced the general opinion in those states that still had vast tracts of unappropriated public lands within their borders. "The scrip," he said, "will pass into the hands of speculators, a remorseless class of vampires, who care little for the general prosperity, and still less for the cause of education." ¹⁸

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in 1862 the Morrill Act was less well known as a land grant college act than as a land grant grab act. And not without reason, as it turned out. For our purpose the point is important, since it helps to understand certain circumstances connected with the founding of Cornell University. It was this attitude towards the Morrill Act that gave credit and currency to the charges against Ezra Cornell. He was charged with being an ordinary land speculator. He was charged with conspiracy to rob the state. He was charged with being primarily interested in grabbing land for the enrichment of the Cornell family rather than for the endowment of Cornell University. As it happens the charges were false, because Ezra Cornell happened to be an honest man; but that was something which, in that golden age of free economic enterprise, no one but a Diogenes would have thought it worth while to light a lantern to look for among the buoyant, pushing crowd of western land buccaneers.

We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that an act so impregnated with the odor of the political trader and the land speculator was not hailed throughout the country as a great edu-

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cational charter. It is true that in 1862, when the country was engaged in a desperate civil war, there was less interest in education than there had been in 1858. But even the avowed friends of agricultural education found singularly little to say in commendation of the Morrill Act. It was in no sense played up in the newspapers, or even much commented upon in the agricultural journals. The *New England Farmer* ignored it altogether. The *American Agriculturalist* gave it a twelve-line summary, and promised to comment later, but did not, for some reason, find time to do so for more than a year. As late as 1891 the founders of Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature* could find no more than six articles on the subject that were worth listing. Indifference to the act is reflected in the general belief that not many states would think the value of the grant worth the obligations they would assume in accepting it. Even Horace Greeley, who defended the act with more spirit than most, seems to have shared this belief: he could only say that the act would have been worth while if even five states took advantage of its provisions.¹⁴

As it turned out, most of the states then in the union did accept the act, but not with much eagerness, or any conviction that they were embracing a splendid opportunity to promote the cause of agricultural education. And after all there was no good reason for any such conviction. The grants were in fact less munificent than we (here at Cornell at any rate) are apt to think. To say that ten million acres of public land was made available for agricultural education sounds very impressive; but when the acres are translated into dollars the result is much less impressive. So much land suddenly dumped on the market inevitably depressed the price, so that quotations fell as low as forty-three cents an acre. Indiana, a fairly typical case, sold its 390,000 scrip acres for an average price of fifty-three cents per acre, netting \$206,700; a sum which, invested even at seven per cent (a possibility at that time) would provide an annual income of \$14,469.¹⁵ Fourteen thousand dollars is fourteen thousand dollars, no doubt; and no college at

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that time would think it a bagatelle—a little loose change which might be slipped to the Superintendent of Grounds for beautifying the campus. But even so, fourteen thousand dollars was only about one fifth of the income of the University of Michigan in 1867, or of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1871¹⁶—that is to say, quite inadequate, even at that time, for maintaining a first-class college. In accepting the grant, therefore, any state was confronted with the not too agreeable fact that the obligations involved, if adequately met, might very well cost it more than the value of the land received.

Generally speaking, the states did no more than was necessary to meet the obligation. Unwilling or unable to make the appropriations necessary for founding a new college, they commonly followed the line of least effort by selling the land or scrip for what it would bring, and turning over the proceeds, such as they were, to whatever existing college was prepared, or could at least make a formal show of being prepared, to give instruction in agriculture and the mechanic arts. In many cases the proceeds were less than they might have been. Some states managed the business badly, others were swindled by speculators, or by government officials in cahoots with speculators. "The story of the disposal of the agricultural scrip by the states," according to Professor Gates, "is one of neglect, carelessness, and something closely akin to corruption." So closely akin as makes no matter, one is apt to think in view of the specific examples given by Professor Gates in support of his statement. His conclusion, at all events, is that "the meager returns received from the land and scrip were [so] discouraging" that "the early history of many of the agricultural colleges is marked with promising beginnings, followed by quick retrenchments."¹⁷ The carelessness and neglect, the "something closely akin to corruption," might have been avoided, no doubt. But that would not, after all, have added a great deal to the sums actually obtained. The truth is that, apart from some extraordinary good luck or the exercise of a questionable ingenuity, it was not

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possible, under the existing conditions, for any state to derive a very large endowment from its share of the Morrill land grant, or to make an effective use of its share without substantial appropriations on its own account.

Of all the states, New York was the most favored by the Morrill Act. Its share of the gift was approximately one tenth—to be exact, 989,920 scrip acres. On March 4, 1863, the New York legislature passed an act “declaring the acceptance . . . of the provisions” of the Morrill Act, and then on May 5 of the same year it passed an act authorizing the Comptroller to receive the scrip and to sell it under certain conditions.¹⁸ There was at that time no reason to suppose that New York would manage its scrip better than other states did, or get more for it per acre. The general expectation, inside and outside of the legislature, was that the scrip would soon be sold, and that it would bring in at most a sum of \$600,000, so that there would be available annually a sum of from thirty-five to forty thousand dollars to be turned over to one or more of the existing colleges.

There were plenty of colleges. According to the Regents' Report for the academic year 1863-1864, there were, subject to the visitation of the Regents, 236 academies in the state. Of these, some twenty odd were classed by the Regents as colleges, with a total registration of 1,527 students. To any one of these colleges, with the possible exception of Columbia, an addition of \$35,000 to its annual income had all the appearance of inexhaustible manna from Heaven, and most of them, having no expectation whatever of obtaining the entire grant, were in favor of having it divided among them all.¹⁹ But there were two colleges that could make a plausible claim for the entire grant, since each one was founded to give instruction in those subjects (agriculture and the mechanic arts) specifically mentioned in the Morrill Act. These were the Agricultural College at Ovid, and the People's College at Havana (now Montour Falls). It is true that in 1863 neither college had any students, nor was either college in a position to meet the

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conditions imposed by the Morrill Act; but any friend of either college could point to its charter and say that its intentions were of the best, since they conformed so exactly to the purposes for which the grant was made.

Such was the situation and such were the expectations in New York in regard to the Morrill land grant in 1863. No man in his right mind supposed that the scrip could be made to yield any such fantastic sum as five million dollars. There were indeed only two ways in which any state could realize from its scrip any such sum as that. One way was to violate the law, as Illinois apparently did, by locating its scrip in another state on its own account, holding it for fifteen or twenty years for a rise in price, and gamble on getting away with it. The other way was to sell its scrip to some individual sufficiently public spirited to locate the land and hold it for a similar period, and then turn the proceeds over to the college selected by the state as the beneficiary of the act. No state could count on there being, at the right time, just that sort of altruist with sufficient ability and capital to carry the business through. New York could not, and did not, count on it either. Yet that is precisely what happened. At precisely the right time, in 1864 and 1865, Ezra Cornell, a member of the Senate much interested in agricultural education, was wondering what he could best do for the public good with some four or five hundred thousand dollars more than he thought his family would need.

The presence of Ezra Cornell, with the settled conviction that he ought to spend his extra cash for the public good, was certainly a most fortunate circumstance for New York, and for higher education in the United States, since it was one of a series of related events which led to the founding of Cornell University. In itself, however, it would not have been sufficient to achieve that result. In 1863, when the Morrill Act was accepted by New York, Ezra Cornell had no intention of founding a new university. He was then working to obtain the proceeds of the land scrip for the State Agricultural College at Ovid; and in 1864, when it seemed

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impossible to obtain all of it, he introduced a bill in the legislature to divide the proceeds between the Agricultural College and the People's College. It had not yet seriously occurred to him that anything more than six hundred thousand dollars could be realized from the scrip, and he seems to have thought that by adding his extra cash to that sum, or to half of it, for the rehabilitation of the Agricultural College, he would be doing all that he could for the promotion of agricultural education in the state of New York.

The presence of Ezra Cornell was perhaps the most important, but after all only one of many odd chances, designs of fate, or interventions of Providence (call it what you like) that seemed, during the crucial years from 1863 to 1865, to be always conspiring to prevent the state of New York from making any but the best use of its gift from the federal government. That fate, or Providence, or the laws of probability should have thus exhibited, at many crucial moments, such unaccustomed interest in the public good is an arresting thought—something that obviously needs to be carefully looked into. But an inquiry into the mysterious behavior of the higher powers is always, or should be, a delicate matter. There are those, of course, who think otherwise—those who regard such an inquiry as in the nature of a bold frontal assault, with vast and heavily armored generalizations, in the hope of reducing the behavior of the higher powers to some simple, invariable law, such as the conflict of economic classes for material gain, or the foreordained, perennial conflict between the clearly discernible forces of light and of darkness. The advantage of proceeding in this way is that, by reducing the individual man to a mere chance deposit on the surface of the world, and the odd chance and recalcitrant event to a negligible exception to the rule, the historian is relieved of the hard task of thinking on his own account—has no longer to make terms with the fact that human life is always exceedingly complex and often inexplicable, or take into account those curious conjunctions of fortuitous circumstances

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and exceptional individuals which, to the unsophisticated, so frequently seem to be the trivial causes of great events.

The founding of Cornell University seems to fall into this category. In relating the story of its founding I shall, therefore, at the risk of being classed with the unsophisticated, ignore the invariable laws of history, and proceed to inquire into the interesting and apparently fortuitous conjunction of circumstances without which it seems extremely unlikely that Cornell University would ever have existed. And this inquiry into the mysterious behavior of the higher powers may well begin, I think, by exploring the minor mystery of Ezra Cornell, a rich but honest man who could make a case of conscience out of the prosaic fact that he had five hundred thousand dollars more than he thought his family would ever need.

III

Circumstances and the Man: Ezra Cornell

My greatest care now is how to spend this large income to do the greatest good to those who are properly dependent on me, to the poor and to posterity.

EZRA CORNELL

I DO not know why it should be so often thought necessary to slander poor people by saying of one's hero that "he was born of poor but honest parents." For once let us take the honesty for granted. Both of Ezra Cornell's parents were poor, and both were of New England stock. Perhaps it should be added that both were Quakers: that admirable fellowship whose members have fared well in the world by adhering to three fundamental articles of faith—the inner light, the brotherhood of man, and, in the City of Brotherly Love at least, as I have been told, five per cent ground rent. Elijah, the father of Ezra, conformed well enough, I dare say, to the first two articles, but he had little occasion to practice the third. Born in Swansea, Bristol County, Massachusetts, he became a journeyman potter and sometime school teacher. From Swansea he moved to Westchester Landing on the Bronx River, and there, on July 4, 1805, he married Eunice Barnard, whose father belonged to the adventurous company of New England sea captains sailing out of New Bedford for the Grand Banks. It was here, at Westchester Landing, to these good people of New England ancestry and Quaker convictions, that Ezra Cornell was born on January 11, 1807.

During the boy's early years the family moved about a good deal, seeking better fortunes in various nearby towns; but finally in 1819 they moved out west to De Ruyter, New York. Ezra was

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then twelve years old, the eldest of six children, the youngest an infant in arms. The long journey was made by the family of eight in a covered wagon, drawn by two horses, and loaded with household goods and potter's implements. Whenever possible they stopped for the night at a farmhouse; more often they had to make do with cooking their meals over a fire by the roadside and sleeping, huddled together, in the wagon. For three weeks, in the chill days and nights of November-December, they thus lived and travelled, moving on to the frontier, land of opportunity.

At De Ruyter Elijah turned to farming, and during the winter months taught the district school, with Ezra one of his pupils. Ezra tells us that "reading, spelling, arithmetic, geography, and grammar were the only branches taught, and it generally required the first month of every winter to regain the knowledge lost during the summer vacation." We may guess that Ezra was the brightest and most diligent pupil. Then or later, certainly, he learned all of these branches of knowledge well enough. But he seems to have taken a special interest in arithmetic. At the age of sixteen, at all events, he got himself a "Cyphering Book" in which he did sums—"I have just got 503 sums to this date," so the record runs in 1824. This was his last year of schooling, and to pay for it he and his brother cleared four acres of forest, cutting the timber for lumber and firewood, pulling the stumps and burning the brush.¹

With his formal education finished at the age of seventeen, Ezra turned to carpentry, which he picked up with such facility that during the next year he designed and built, with a good deal of neighborly applause, a very sound frame house on his father's farm. The same year or the next he set out, with nine dollars in his pocket, to make his fortune, working for some three years at carpentry and other trades at Syracuse and Homer; and then, one day in April, 1828, with a little spare cash in his pocket and a box of carpenter's tools over his shoulder, he walked from De Ruyter to McLean, and the next day went on to Ithaca, catching his first sight of the town, as like as not, as he came up the rise from Free

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Hollow (Forest Home) round Beebe Lake. The first thing he did, according to his brother-in-law, Otis E. Wood, was to enter a hotel and indulge in "one of his Quaker capers. He said to the landlord: 'If a decent young man were to come along and say that he had had no breakfast and had no money to pay for one, what would you do?' 'I would tell him to come in and have something to eat.' 'Well,' said Ezra, 'here's your chance.' When he came out after he had had his breakfast, he put down twenty-five cents. 'I thought you didn't have any money,' says the landlord. 'No, I didn't say so. I just wanted to know what you would do if I didn't have any.' " ²

When Ezra Cornell came to Ithaca, at the age of twenty-one, he was a tall, angular, physically powerful man. A picture taken at the time discloses a large head, with deeply lobed, protruding ears and high cheek bones. The dark hair, carefully brushed down for the occasion, surmounts and partly conceals a high, well shaped forehead. Beneath prominent but unaggressive brows, wide-set eyes look out with attention, appraisingly, yet with a certain detachment, as if they were reserving judgment: an impression confirmed by the strong nose and chin, and a mouth that is wide, firmly set, and a bit grim at the corners without being either tight or bitter. Altogether a face that reveals character—the self-reliance of a man who has learned to take it, who proposes to meet without fear or elation a world that he knows to be exacting and unromantic, and to make the most of whatever it may have to offer to one upon whom Fortune has conferred no extraneous favors, no favors at all except good health, tempered courage, and sound common sense.³

Such qualities, however, being the essential ones, served the young man well enough. On July 16, 1828, he began to work in Mr. Eddy's cotton mill, located on the site of the present Cascadilla Hall.⁴ The next year he obtained what proved to be a permanent job in Jeremiah Beebe's plaster and flour mill near the Fall Creek bridge over the present lower lake road. Two years

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later, on March 19, 1831, he married Mary Ann Wood, whom he had met at her home in Dryden before coming to Ithaca. To be near the mill, he built a house called "The Nook" about two hundred yards north of Fall Creek, and there his nine children were born. Since Mary Ann was not a Quaker, Ezra was expelled from the fellowship for marrying out of meeting; and it is said that a good Quaker, in the way of duty, walked the forty miles from De Ruyter to inform brother Ezra that he had committed a grave fault, but that he might be reinstated if he would say he was sorry. Ezra replied, with some firmness, that he would never be sorry for the best act of his life. The reply was characteristic. As a young man, and throughout his life, Ezra Cornell formed opinions and reached decisions with a most serene indifference to what others might think or do, and once having formed his opinion or reached his decision he was not disposed to think any better of it because others approved, or any less well because others opposed it. This trait Andrew D. White once described by saying that, in respect to a certain matter, "Mr. Cornell was what he calls 'firm,' but what we rather called 'obstinate.' " ⁵

One essential quality of Ezra Cornell's intelligence was a Yankee flair for manipulating material things and mastering practical affairs—a talent that soon won for him the confidence of his employer and his fellow townsmen. "I commenced working for Mr. Beebe," he says, "in 1829 at repairing his plaster mill at Fall Creek. After the mill was repaired . . . I took a contract of him to grind and measure out to customers 600 tons of plaster for fifty cents per ton. . . . The next first of May, I commenced working for him by the year, taking charge of all his business at Fall Creek at a salary of \$350 per annum. . . . The summer of 1830 I . . . blasted the tunnel through the rock to take water from the dam above the falls for the mill. . . . In 1831 we lowered the tunnel four feet, and built a new dam across the creek." Under Ezra's management the business seems to have prospered greatly, so that in 1838-39 he

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designed and supervised the construction of a larger factory, "the most complete of any in the state at that time."⁶

Meantime, the rising young business man took an active part in the affairs of the community. He subscribed for ten shares in the Tompkins County Bank. He joined the Whig party, and was often to be seen on the counter of John J. Speed's store of an evening, as Theodore Cuyler remembered him, "a shrewd, managing chap—unfolding schemes for carrying the township for the Whig ticket." He was sufficiently esteemed to be elected, in 1837, a delegate to the county convention, and to be asked, in the same year, to address an audience of business men on the subject, highly important at the moment, of bank failures.⁷ At the age of thirty Ezra Cornell was obviously on the way to become a leading citizen of the community; and on his record one might have expected him to be, at the age of forty-five, the rich man of the town, owner of the principal mills, trustee of the bank, local political tycoon, and no doubt the envied owner of a mansion, on Buffalo Street perhaps, more mistakenly Gothic and pretentious than any that now survive to render that noble thoroughfare gloomy and forbidding.

But this is all pure fancy. At the age of forty-seven Ezra Cornell was, as he tells us in his *Cyphering Book*, sunk under a mountainous debt of fifty thousand dollars.

Now this, surely, is an odd thing to have happened to a shrewd, hard-headed, prudent young business man; and we naturally ask what could have brought about such an astounding defeat of the practical intelligence and its grasp of affairs. Both circumstances and the man contributed to the defeat, but the man more than the circumstances. The initial circumstance was the panic of 1837,⁸ as a consequence of which in 1841 Ezra Cornell, at the age of thirty-four, lost his job. A reverse certainly, but surely not, at the age of thirty-four, a disaster. An ordinary shrewd, prudent young business man would have begun again, got another job in the community, saved his money, and then gone on in the conventional

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way to become a solid citizen. But Ezra Cornell was not an ordinary business man, and he did not act quite as an ordinary business man would have done.

Ezra Cornell might be described succinctly as a tough-minded idealist. There are a couple of revealing letters written by him at the age of forty or thereabouts to his son Alonzo, then a lad of about fifteen. He advises the boy, as fathers are apt to do with unnecessary repetition, to study hard; but he recommends to him two rules which he thinks especially useful for the guidance of one's life. The first is the Golden Rule: "As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them." The second he thinks almost equally important: Keep a daily expense account book, do not spend a cent without "putting it down . . . with the name of the article."⁹ A modern version of "trust God and keep your powder dry"! The first rule Ezra observed as well as most men, rather better, in fact; but I suspect that the second was so strongly recommended to the son because it was a counsel of perfection which the father himself could not follow. The daily expense account book is for the near in spirit, who live in hourly fear that on some unguarded occasion a nickel may slip unobserved through their fingers. Ezra Cornell was not at all that kind of man. He was too large-handed to be always pinching the pennies; his own daily expense account books—the few that have been preserved¹⁰—are rather sad affairs; and even in his major undertakings he was often astonishingly casual in attending to financial details.

The point is that Ezra Cornell cared singularly little either for business or money-making. He had indeed the Yankee flair for gadgets, a hard practical intelligence, a dry salty humorous appreciation of the foibles of men, and a certain talent (not nearly as good as he often thought) for beating them (or, as he said, for "tiring them out") at their own game. In all this he was as native to these states as Ben Franklin or the Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg. But with all his grasp of the practical there was in him a marked strain of Quaker mysticism, a fine Quaker feeling that

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success in life is not to be attained by prudential insurance against material mischances. His brother-in-law called him a "visionary";¹¹ and so, if his grand enterprises had failed, as they came very near doing, he would have been regarded. Above all he was not a prudent man intent upon a small security; or a vain man living in the opinion of others and vulnerable to ridicule; or a self-regarding man reluctant to expose himself by going out on a limb. Not the least dominant of his characteristics, perhaps inherited from his seafaring ancestor, was the impulse to chance it, the dour determination to accomplish at all hazards something out of the ordinary, something that would do him credit and the world no disadvantage. Both his failures and his successes were the result of his serene self-confidence, his willingness to back his own judgment and, throwing prudence to the winds, to gamble, win or lose all, for high stakes.

Let us now return to the activities of the young business man who has lost his job, in order to understand how these various qualities contrived to make him at the age of forty-seven a bankrupt, at the age of fifty-seven a millionaire, and from that moment until the end of his life an open-handed philanthropist.

Having lost one safe job the young man did not scurry around to find another, because a safe job was never what he had most in mind for himself. As early as 1833 he wrote to his father requesting a loan of \$800 "to doo business with." He refers to "my tavern house," which he insured for \$750, and "my barn" adjoining it, which he insured for \$100. What after all was a safe job to a man of property with a tavern house and a barn? To a man who was at the same time running Mr. Beebe's farm, buying fine stock for the farm, and hiring Henry Brooks to work for him for \$19 a month, and "keep himself"—yes, and "keep my brother Benjamin" to boot! Besides, he had other interests. In 1841 he visited eastern cities, as an authorized agent, to "dispose of water privileges for manufacturing and other purposes." He himself built a pottery factory, subscribed for shares in a new company to establish a

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woolen mill at Fall Creek, and bought for \$160 the patent rights, for Maine and Georgia, of Barnaby and Mooers' recently invented "double mole-board side hill and level land plow." Let the safe job go! All else failing, he would seek his fortune in Maine and Georgia with the double mole-board plow.¹²

And so, late in 1841 Ezra went to Maine, and in 1843 to Georgia, walking most of the way—a means of travel he preferred to any other. And why not? A strong man, maintaining a good clip, could easily cover forty miles in thirteen hours, thus leaving, out of the twenty-four, two for meals, seven for sleep, and two with nothing whatever to do. An exhilarating and a leisurely life, really, besides enabling one to see the country to best advantage. In this leisurely and care-free way Ezra arrived, in 1843, in Georgia, but only to find, unfortunately, that the only plow needed in that great agricultural state was a hoe in the hand of a slave.¹³

All this time Mary Ann and the children remained at The Nook, doing the best they could with the garden, and the income from the tavern house and the farm and miscellaneous rentals collected, or not as the case might be, from persons living in "the sellar room" and such odd places. Judging from the letters of E. L. Stuvins, to whom Ezra intrusted the management of his properties during his absence, they were not doing any too well; so that Father Wood had to "come with his lumber wagon loaded with things to carry the family along." So at least we are told by Ezra's brother-in-law, Otis E. Wood. And we are also told that when Ezra returned from Georgia, "instead of bringing at least a sack of flour or something practical, he brought a trunk full of gilt-edged books."¹⁴

Leaving the books to the family and the family to Father Wood and Mr. Stuvins, Ezra then went a second (or it may have been a third) time to Maine, hoping to sell his plow there. In Portland he looked up his friend F. O. J. Smith, whom he found on the floor of his office trying, with a piece of chalk, to explain to another man the kind of machine he wanted devised and constructed. "Cornell," said Smith, "you are the very man I wanted to see." It seemed

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that Smith had obtained the contract for laying an underground cable of wires between Baltimore and Washington to test S. F. B. Morse's electric telegraph invention; and for that he thought he needed two machines, one to dig the trench and lay the cable, the other to cover the cable after it was laid. Could Cornell help him? Cornell could. "A little reflection," says Mr. Cornell, "convinced me that he did not want two machines. . . . I, therefore, with my pencil sketched a rough diagram of a machine. . . . The pipe, with the wires inclosed, . . . was to be coiled around a drum or reel, from whence it was to pass down a hollow standard . . . directly in the rear of the coulter or cutter, which was so arranged as to cut a furrow two and a half feet deep and one and one fourth inch wide. Arranged something like a plow, it was to be drawn by a powerful team, and deposit the pipe in the bottom of the furrow as it moved along. The furrow being so narrow would soon close itself." ¹⁶ It was as simple as that, and, let us note, as simple as that to describe.

The outcome of this chance meeting was that Smith authorized Ezra to design and construct the plow, and then offered him the job of laying the pipe. Convinced that the telegraph was to be a "grand enterprise," and that it would, if he became identified with it, lead him "on the road to fortune," Ezra accepted the offer, and early in October, 1843, left Portland for Baltimore.

The plow worked admirably, but with some ten miles of the pipe laid it was found that, on account of defective insulation, all the work so far done was wasted effort. To let this be known would prejudice the entire undertaking, and make it difficult to obtain additional appropriations from Congress; and one day Professor Morse, in great distress, called Ezra from his plow to ask him if he could suggest any way of suspending operations without giving the true reason. Ezra's ingenuity made little of so slight a difficulty. Stepping back to the plow, he directed the teamsters to start up the mules; and, watching for an opportunity, with simulated clumsiness canted the point of the plow into a ledge of rock and broke it to pieces. The next day it was reported in the newspapers that on

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account of this "unfortunate accident" the work would have to be suspended for a few weeks. The weeks dragged on while Professor Morse and Alfred Vail and F. O. J. Smith experimented with other methods of insulating the wires in the pipe. Meantime, Ezra spent his spare time boning up on electricity, and came to the conclusion that the simplest and cheapest way would be to abandon the underground system altogether and string the wires separately on poles, insulating them at the cross bars by wrapping them around glass knobs, such as might be found on bureau drawers. After still further delay, and consultation with Professor Henry at Princeton, this method, used to this day, was finally adopted; and Ezra was employed as Professor Morse's assistant at \$1,000 a year to build the line, which he did with such dispatch and economy that the work was completed in May, 1844, without any need of an additional appropriation from Congress.¹⁶

Thus at the age of thirty-seven Ezra Cornell became identified with the "grand enterprise." He was then, I will not say in towering high spirits, but as nearly so as it was in the nature of Ezra Cornell ever to be. To Mr. Beebe he wrote saying that he would soon be a wealthy man, and to Mary Ann saying that "Old Dame Fortune was bestirring herself to make amends."¹⁷ His optimism was misplaced. The story of his venture on the road to fortune during the next twelve years is not one of success attained by the orderly and progressive mastery of difficulties encountered. On the contrary, it is the story of repeated and magnificent failures. The story cannot be told in detail here; but the high lights need to be presented in order to understand how Ezra Cornell acquired a fortune, as one may say, by misadventure, by violating all the rules of prudence and common sense and adhering, with stubborn tenacity, contrary to experience and all sound advice, to a settled conviction. The settled conviction was that the telegraph business was bound to be a phenomenal success; and the key to the story is that the telegraph business turned out to be something very near a complete failure while Ezra Cornell was actively engaged in

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promoting it, and became a phenomenal success only after he had retired from active connection with the enterprise.

In 1844 Ezra Cornell evidently thought that his services in building the Washington-Baltimore line would make him useful if not indispensable to the men who, as owners of the Morse patent, were in a position to control the telegraph business. These men were Morse and Alfred Vail, who together owned three fourths of the patent right, and F. O. J. Smith, who owned the remaining one fourth. After the federal government had declined an offer of all rights for \$100,000, Morse and Vail intrusted the management of their interests to Amos Kendall, but F. O. J. Smith preferred to manage his own. In May, 1845, Smith and Kendall organized the Magnetic Telegraph Company to complete the line from Baltimore to New York. In the years following other companies were organized by them for connecting the principal eastern cities—notably the New York, Albany and Buffalo Company. But F. O. J. Smith, who quarrelled with every one, proved to be a thorn in the side of Morse and Kendall; so that in 1847 it was agreed between them that thereafter Kendall should have the right of disposing of the patent rights for lines built in the East and South, while Smith should have a similar right for lines built in the northern states west of Buffalo. Under this agreement the patent right was variously leased, under contracts so loosely worded as to be the occasion of endless litigation, and lines were rapidly and flimsily built throughout the country.¹⁸

Ezra Cornell's part in these early enterprises was less than he had hoped. He managed to scrape together \$500 for twenty shares of stock in the Magnetic Company. In 1845 he supervised the construction of seventy miles of the line from New York to Philadelphia, making little or nothing from it. But in 1846 he built under contract the line from New York to Albany, which netted him the substantial profit of \$6,000. This, together with some two thousand dollars in the bank, made him a capitalist, capable of venturing as a promoter on his own. He could now afford an in-

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surance premium of \$34.40. He could even afford a "dress coat"—purely as an investment, no doubt, useful for making friends and influencing people with money to invest in the telegraph business. To advance his interest he formed a business partnership with his old friend and prominent Ithaca merchant, John J. Speed, Jr., who thus became one of the men with whom he was most closely associated in all of his major enterprises.¹⁹ Another of these associates, unfortunately, was F. O. J. Smith.

Unfortunately, because F. O. J. Smith turned out to be a man of such devious ways that he was commonly known in the trade as "Fog" Smith, and the term "fogsmithery" became current as a synonym for any kind of crookedness in the telegraph business. Cornell and Speed would have done better to have allied themselves with Morse and Kendall, even if Kendall was a bit condescending and Morse more than a bit vain and irritable. But Mr. Cornell had then a double grievance against Morse. He felt that his services in building the first line, and—as he always maintained—in improving the Morse sending instrument, had not been adequately recognized. Besides, a sending instrument which he had himself invented and patented in 1845 and urged Morse to use, was rejected by Morse on the ground that it was no more than a "clumsification" of his own.²⁰ For these or whatever reasons Cornell and Speed became involved with "Fog" Smith in their two major telegraph enterprises.

The first of these was the Erie and Michigan Telegraph Company, organized to build and operate a line from Buffalo through Cleveland and Detroit to Chicago and Milwaukee. The contract, originally let by Fog Smith to Livingston and Wells, was soon taken over by Cornell and Speed,²¹ who completed the line early in 1848, and thereafter obtained a controlling interest in the Erie and Michigan and many other western lines built as feeders to it. The other enterprise was the New York and Erie, running (roughly along the route of the Erie Railroad) from New York through Middletown, Binghamton, Ithaca, and Fredonia to Dunkirk on Lake

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Erie. The disposal of the Morse patent rights in this region properly belonged to Amos Kendall; but Cornell had no wish to do business with Morse and Kendall, and Fog Smith made nothing of leasing the patent in his own or another's territory, especially if that other was Kendall. Accordingly, on February 28, 1848, Fog Smith signed with Cornell and Speed the contract for building and operating the New York and Erie line.

Why Cornell and Speed should wish to build the New York and Erie line is obvious: linked up with their western lines it would give them a through trunk line from Cleveland and Chicago to New York. But, one naturally asks (and Amos Kendall asked it with great indignation), why should Fog Smith wish to build a line that would compete directly with the New York, Albany and Buffalo line in which he, to say nothing of his partners Morse and Kendall, had a major interest? The answer is that the New York and Erie, so far as Fog Smith was concerned in it, was a case of "fogsmithery" at its most foggiest. Evidence of this is to be found, with some difficulty it is true, in the terms of the New York and Erie contract in which Fog Smith appears as both vendor and vendee—a contract admirably designed, in short, to enable Smith to risk nothing and lose nothing himself, to do his partners Morse and Kendall out of their fair share of the patent rights, to put all the risk and labor on his partners Cornell and Speed, to take half the profits of their enterprise if it succeeded, and to leave them holding the sack if it failed.²²

Ezra Cornell's animus against Morse appears to have blinded him to the essential dishonesty of Fog Smith; but he was too astute a man to be deceived by the flagrant "fogsmithery" of the New York and Erie contract. What deceived him was his own optimism—his settled conviction that any risk in the telegraph business was bound to be a safe bet. In 1848, with the Erie and Michigan in operation and the New York and Erie in process of construction, he was therefore in a mood to see himself as the dominant figure in the grand enterprise. The tone of his letters to Alonzo, who was

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then running the Cleveland office, is assured and at times magisterial. "I have now," he writes in December, "such advantages in the telegraph business that I shall be able to make an ample fortune for myself and each of my children." At that time the Erie and Michigan was just beginning to pay expenses, the New York and Erie still lacked two thirds of the money required for construction, both companies were bound to Fog Smith by contracts that no prudent man would ever have signed—and yet Ezra Cornell could count six ample fortunes as good as made.²³

No forecast of the immediate future could have been more completely mistaken. Within less than three years Ezra Cornell was reduced to the humiliation of soliciting financial aid from his rival, Amos Kendall. Writing in September, 1851, he told Kendall that all of the real estate he possessed was mortgaged, and that he was in debt "some \$15,000 besides." For two years past, he confessed, "I have not received the first dollar for my services, and have not been able to contribute the first cent towards the support of my family. They are wholly dependent on the charity of friends, and every line of telegraph that I have any interest in . . . are [is] running in debt for expence of working, and I can see no prospect for any favorable change. Under such circumstances what is to be done? For my part I cannot answer the question. My wife . . . feels that I have followed the telegraph quite long enough, and that it would be to our interest to abandon it, and direct my energies to some more productive channels." But to abandon the telegraph business was, for Ezra Cornell at least, even more difficult than to go on with it: first, because the lines would not pay his debts even if they could be sold; second, because they could not be sold anyway on account of the "unsettled state of the patent question."²⁴ He therefore stuck it out, only to see his indebtedness mount until, in 1854, it had reached the appalling sum of fifty thousand dollars.

The principal cause of this crisis in the affairs of Ezra Cornell was the failure of the New York and Erie. From the first everything went wrong with that most cherished of all Cornell enter-

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prises. Instead of \$50,000 needed for construction, less than \$20,000 was forthcoming. But by borrowing from his friends, pinching his family, personally supervising the construction of the line, working day and night, going sometimes a week at a time without taking off his clothes, he managed somehow to get the line up. To the operators along the line he was a familiar bedraggled figure, known as "Old Bones," not infrequently to be seen rummaging in the petty cash (the only cash there was for the most part) for two bits to buy his dinner. He even managed to pay Fog Smith \$4,000 on the patent-right account, which Fog Smith conveniently forgot, so that Morse brought suit against Smith for his share of the patent money, and then Smith brought suit against Cornell for the whole of it. Curiously enough, even Ezra's flair for gadgets failed him for once. Having himself devised the simplest and best method of insulation by means of glass knobs, he now invented and used a contraption known as the "Brimstone Hat," which was not only expensive but, in damp weather, rather worse than no insulation at all. For these and other reasons the New York and Erie was a complete failure. Sold at sheriff's auction in 1852, it was bid in by Mr. Cornell for \$7,000, and leased for two years to his rival, the New York, Albany and Buffalo Company. In 1855 it ceased to be operated, and the wires were sold to the Erie Railroad.²⁵

Unfortunately for Mr. Cornell, the failure of the New York and Erie came at a time when all of his other lines were ceasing to pay expenses. For this he was himself in part responsible. His optimism had led him to build or acquire control of more lines than he could well manage. In any case, as a manager of complicated enterprises, Ezra Cornell had certain limitations. Generally respected by his associates and subordinates, he was not very well liked by them. He was too austere, too little disposed to take advice, a little too certain that others rather than himself were at fault, to win the warm friendship or command the loyal devotion of those with whom he worked. According to J. H. Wade, he lacked the talent for delegating authority, and as a consequence wasted his

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time on a multitude of trivial details. "Your God," said Wade, in a long, frank, and sarcastic letter in 1853, "is *economy*, but you make a slight mistake and worship *parsimony* (at a sacrifice to yourself and everything you are able to influence). . . . I have known you to economize by leaving your official chair [as President of the New York and Erie] without even a substitute, for two months at a time, and travel on foot and knee deep in mud, from New York to Dunkirk, and carry on your shoulders a 24 foot ladder, when some *foolish, extravagant* president would have paid an Irishman \$12 a month for doing the same thing, while he was staying in his office and attending to his business." ²⁶

But whatever the limitations of Mr. Cornell as an administrator may have been, it must be said that his lines were not the only ones that were failing. In 1854 even the most able and prudent owners and managers of telegraph lines were facing disaster. The principal reason for this situation was the rapid duplication of competing lines throughout the country—lines using the Morse patent, and lines using the recently patented "printing" instruments of Alexander Bain and Royal E. House. The larger cities were commonly served by three, or even four, rival telegraph offices. But rarely was any of them open after nine o'clock in the evening, and at any time of day the chances were good that one would find on the door of any office the familiar notice: "Closed temporarily, gone to fix the line." In 1854 there was scarcely a business man of credit left who still had any faith in the telegraph business. Nevertheless, Ezra Cornell's faith remained unimpaired: with existing lines failing to pay expenses, he built or acquired control of more lines; with stocks a drug on the market, he bought more stocks. And so it happened that the six ample fortunes which, in 1848, he thought as good as made, had dwindled away to a fifty-thousand-dollar debt incurred by the failure of the New York and Erie, and extensive holdings in the Erie and Michigan and other western lines that could not be sold in the open market at any price. It was indeed

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true, as he said himself, that if the game had ended then he would have been "swept from the board."

From this precarious situation Ezra Cornell was rescued, one might say in spite of himself, by the formation of the Western Union Telegraph Company. Consolidation of competing lines was the obvious solution, and Mr. Cornell had himself, as early as 1851, suggested it casually in conversation with W. H. Ellsworth.²⁷ But the men chiefly responsible for the formation of the Western Union were Hiram Sibley and Samuel L. Selden. In 1851, having acquired the House patent rights and \$90,000 raised by Sibley from his Rochester friends, they organized the New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company. Sibley had the very sound idea that in any region one line, if solidly constructed and competently managed, would soon force the existing lines into bankruptcy or consolidation. By 1854 his policy had sufficiently proved its worth to make the New York and Mississippi Valley Company (or "the House Lines," as they were called) the most dangerous competitor of all other companies. In letter after letter Mr. Cornell's operators informed him that the House lines were gradually taking what little business remained. "The House folks," wrote W. P. Pew from the Pittsburgh office, "like the fiends out of hell," are "bent on your destruction." To avoid destruction on the one hand, and consolidation with the House lines on the other, Mr. Cornell fought, as Otis E. Wood said, "with all his might": came to terms with his old rival, the New York, Albany and Buffalo Company; with its aid acquired control of the Michigan Southern; and even attempted to form his own "grand combination" of all Morse lines against "the common enemy."²⁸

But all without avail. The battle was virtually lost in 1854 when, either without Mr. Cornell's knowledge or against his protest, four of his principal associates (Speed, Wade, Haviland, and Cobb) deserted him by selling their Erie and Michigan stock to the House companies and associating themselves with the Sibley crowd. Early

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in 1855 the Sibley people offered the Erie and Michigan definite terms of union, and assured Mr. Cornell that if he refused consolidation on fair terms they would run him out of business. The terms offered were, according to Mr. Cornell, all to the advantage of the House companies; but, with some modifications that made them less objectionable to him, they were formally accepted by the board of directors in August, 1855. The contract provided for the organization of a new company with a capital stock issue of 500,000 shares, of which the Sibley interests were to receive 350,000 and the Cornell interests 150,000. The new company was incorporated in March and April, 1856, and at Mr. Cornell's request was given the name of the Western Union Telegraph Company. The merger included all of the Cornell lines except the Michigan Southern; but scarcely more than a year later, July 17, 1857, Mr. Cornell abandoned the game altogether by selling the Michigan Southern for shares in the Western Union.²⁹

When the merger was thus completed in 1857, the value of the Western Union stock credited to Ezra Cornell was estimated at \$50,000. Thirteen years of incessant and heartbreaking effort to acquire a fortune in the telegraph business had brought him a property which, if it could then have been turned into cash, would barely have paid his debts. He had, at all events, the advantage, whatever that might prove to be, of being the largest stockholder in the new company, and for some years he served on its board of directors; but responsibility for the management and phenomenal success of the Western Union Telegraph Company fell mainly to other men.

In this way, not quite as he had intended, Ezra Cornell retired from the "grand enterprise"—returned home, as one may say from the wars, if with something less than a complete victory, at least with honor and peace in his time. Some years before, in the midst of the wars, he had advised Alonzo that in choosing a profession a person should consider how far its permanency "would depend on his own will and how far on the will of others."³⁰ Certainly Ezra

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had himself found that the telegraph business depended altogether too much on the will of others; and once rid of it he was well content to turn to other and more congenial interests—to farming and breeding fine stock, to promoting the interests of Ithaca and serving his community in the state legislature, to the affairs of the state Agricultural Society, and especially to the movement for founding a state agricultural college.

Meantime he could begin to pay his debts. One day in October, 1860, he turned up his old Cyphering Book. The last entry in it, made at the age of seventeen, was a bold heading: "Loss and Gain." Under this heading he now, after thirty-five years, thought fit to make an entry: noting that all his life had been a desperate struggle to see which, loss or gain, would win; that in 1854, sunk under a mountainous debt of fifty thousand dollars, the issue seemed a "doubtful one"; but that at the present moment, February 1, 1860, that debt "has mostly been paid . . . with 7 percent interest added, and a yearly income of \$15,000 seems to be a reliable guaranty that the credit side has now the victory." Never before had Ezra Cornell been out of debt with an income of fifteen thousand dollars. Yet this was only the first slight trickle of the golden stream that was to come pouring in from the Western Union Telegraph Company. In 1862, with its capital stock raised within three years from 385,700 to 2,994,800 shares, the company paid a valid stock dividend of thirty-six per cent. In 1864, Ezra therefore thought fit to make another entry in the Cyphering Book: "My last quarterly dividend on stock in the Western Union was \$35,000, July 20, 1864. The dividend for October quarter will be as large."

Thus within four years Ezra Cornell's income, without effort on his part, had jumped from fifteen thousand to one hundred and forty thousand dollars. But what would Ezra Cornell do with all this money? Live in the gilded luxury to which he was not accustomed? No. For Ezra Cornell, with his dour, hard-bitten New England conscience, with his fine Quaker feeling for justice and humanity, there was just the one obvious thing to do with his

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superfluous wealth. And so he sets it down, with great simplicity, in the Cyphering Book: "My greatest care now is how to spend this large income to do the greatest good to those who are properly dependent on me, to the poor and to posterity." ³¹

Like many other men of that time Ezra Cornell believed profoundly in a better time coming for the poor and for posterity. Some twenty years earlier he had told Alonzo that it was clear to all reflecting minds that a great revolution was about to begin—"a revolution by which the down trodden millions will be elevated to their equal and just rights, and each led to procure and enjoy that degree of happiness that all men and women are entitled to as the fruit of their labor." ³² Among the downtrodden millions were the farmers and the industrial workers; and what better could be done to elevate them to their equal and just rights than to provide them with the means of obtaining an education suited to their needs? Having acquired an education the hard way himself, Ezra Cornell all his life believed (mistakenly, no doubt) that if books and schools were freely available to the people, any poor boy could make as good use of them as he would have done if they had been available to him. To make these advantages, which he had lacked, available to others—this, clearly, would be to use his large income to do the greatest good to the poor and to posterity.

His first notable contribution to this end was the founding of the Cornell Library (a free public library for the citizens of Tompkins County), which he built and endowed at an ultimate cost of something more than one hundred thousand dollars. As for schools, his lifelong interest in farming led him to read and reflect much on the education of farmers; and after his retirement from the telegraph business he took an active part in founding the State Agricultural College at Ovid, and was the most influential member of its board of trustees. The college first opened its doors to students in December, 1860; but eleven months later it was forced to close them because the president, Brigadier General M. R. Patrick, had been called to the army and many of the students had en-

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listed. In 1863, when the Morrill Act was accepted by the state, the college was still closed. At that time it consisted of a charter, an empty building capable of housing one hundred and fifty students, and a farm of four hundred and fifty acres in good condition. The trustees estimated that the farm and building had a current value of \$101,780; but against this had to be set a mortgage debt of \$70,000.³³ With this much to show, the trustees applied to the legislature for the Morrill land grant, and the prime mover in the business was Ezra Cornell. At that time it had not occurred to him that the Morrill land grant could be made to yield more than thirty-five or forty thousand dollars a year; but he thought that if in addition to this the legislature would pay the debt and provide adequate buildings and equipment, the purposes of the Morrill Act would be realized to the best advantage. In that case he did not know of anything better to do with his large income than to add what he could (perhaps two hundred thousand dollars) to the college endowment.

As it turned out, fortunately we must suppose, the legislature was not sufficiently interested in agricultural education to make any appropriation for it; and there were plenty of colleges in the state more than willing to accept the Morrill land grant without any additional appropriations from the legislature.³⁴ One of these was the People's College, designed by its founders to give instruction in "those branches of science immediately and vitally essential to agriculture and the mechanic arts." The college had been chartered in 1853, but for lack of funds nothing further had been done until 1858, when Charles Cook, a wealthy resident of Havana (now Montour Falls) promised substantial financial aid if the college should be located in his home town. This offer was accepted, the Rev. Amos Brown was elected president, and on September 2, 1858, the corner stone of the main building was laid with appropriate ceremonies. The aid promised by Mr. Cook turned out to be so much less than munificent that in 1863, although the main building had been erected, no student had as yet darkened its door,

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and supposing one should do so there were no adequate facilities, in fact virtually no facilities at all, for teaching him agriculture and the mechanic arts. Nevertheless, on May 14, 1863, the legislature appropriated the entire Morrill land grant to the People's College.³⁵

What in this instance determined the legislative mind (a difficult thing to fathom at best) is not clear. Senator Cook (as he then was) undoubtedly used all of his considerable influence (he was known as "the leader of the third house"), and it is said here and there that he even resorted to "political trickery." That may well be, no doubt; but in any event he was unable, fortunately, to obtain the grant for the People's College except on certain conditions. The conditions were that the college should have, within three years, at least ten competent professors, buildings adequate to house two hundred and fifty students, a farm of two hundred acres free of encumbrance, shops suitable for teaching the mechanic arts, a library, scientific apparatus, and "cabinets of natural history."³⁶

The People's College evidently lacked a good deal—according to the Regents' Report two years later, what it lacked would require \$242,000 to remedy;³⁷ but it was generally expected that Senator Cook would donate the necessary sum, for why should he have resorted to political trickery, or whatever it was, to obtain the grant if he did not intend to put the college in a position to accept it? Senator Cook may have intended, at the time, to do just that. But then one of those fortunate odd chances again intervened to change the course of events. At exactly the most appropriate moment Senator Cook suffered a stroke of paralysis, and thereafter refused categorically and repeatedly to give any further financial assistance to the college.³⁸ So long as Senator Cook remained in this unamiable frame of mind there was slight chance that the People's College would get the grant after all. It seemed certain, therefore, that the legislature, at the next session, would have to burden its mind once more with the difficult problem; and Ezra Cornell had decided that it would be worth while to introduce a bill for dividing the grant, leaving the People's College in posses-

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sion of one half of it, and giving the other half to the State Agricultural College at Ovid.

This was the situation when, on the first of January, 1864, a newly elected senator from Syracuse entered the chamber for the first time and took his seat. He was a young man—thirty-one years old; slight in stature, alert in bearing; with fine, wavy brown hair parted nearly in the middle, worn rather long, and running to sideburns; in appearance and demeanor a man suggesting, in some undefinable way, the intellectual and the aristocrat. To the seasoned senators he must have seemed somewhat fragile and a bit dandified; and I should think the more cultured among them may have wondered whether it might not be that Mr. Matthew Arnold, mistaking the time and place, had dropped in to deliver a lecture on sweetness and light. It was not so. The young senator was Andrew Dickson White.

Taking account of his colleagues, Mr. White noticed, sitting not far away, "a man of about sixty years of age, tall, spare, and austere, with a kindly eye, saying little, and that little dryly. He did not appear unamiable, but there was about him a sort of aloofness: this was Ezra Cornell." ³⁸ Of all the odd chances or designs of fate that seemed in those years to be always conspiring for the public good, this conjunction of men and circumstances was the most fruitful; for the result of it was that Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White became fast friends, exchanged their ideas, joined their forces, and thereby became the effective creators of Cornell University.

IV

Circumstances and the Man: Andrew Dickson White

From my first years in college it has been the steady aim of my life to aid in founding and building a worthy American university.

ANDREW D. WHITE

"SAYING little, and that little dryly"—so Andrew D. White noted one of the salient characteristics of Ezra Cornell. That an intelligent man should say little must always have seemed strange to Andrew D. White: he was himself, on every occasion, so well prepared and eager to say a great deal.

One day in the fall of 1917 George Lincoln Burr took me to see Mr. White at his house on the campus. He was then eighty-five years old. We found him in his library, sitting before the fireplace, surrounded by his beloved books. Three walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling, and a large table was piled two or three high with the newest books, one of which Mr. White had been reading. He received us with unstudied courtesy and an air of pleased anticipation, as if we were both old and valued friends, the two men in the world whom he most wanted just then to see. He began talking before we were fairly in the room, and kept on talking for an hour and a half, not so much to us or with us as for us and for himself, and for the pure joy of practicing the art, as if cultivated conversation were God's best gift to men. He spoke of the good fortune of Cornell in inducing me to join its faculty, and of my good fortune in being associated with his friend George Burr whose learning and wisdom he had himself found of unailing

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assistance; spoke of the new book he was then reading, and of other new books he had recently read by authors unknown to him, and asked us what we thought of them, and then, before we could start anything, told us what *he* thought of them; spoke of the war and the Fourteen Points and of Bismarck whom he had known and liked, but now thought in some sense responsible, with his blood and iron, for the war; spoke of early Cornell days and difficulties, and of Ezra Cornell, a remarkable and lovable man, and of the realization of his early dreams for the university, and of its future prospects, which would always be good so long as the most eminent scholars could be got to come to it; spoke of many other things besides—a copious flow of narrative and commentary, of incidents and anecdotes and judgments light and serious, moving on, without haste, without rest, like a prairie river in spring, gently irresistible, swelling up and around and over all obstacles, all conversational reticences and awkwardnesses, filling all silences, carrying us and himself serenely along on the broad surface of his knowledge and experiences recalled.

We said, and needed to say, and had a chance to say, very little.

The voice was warm and persuasive, infinitely persuasive, so that one wanted nothing better than just to listen and take it in. The voice was also a little husky, as if it may have been going on in just this happy way, except for the minimum of unavoidable cessations, for eighty-three years, ever since the first full-blown sentence was uttered at the age, maybe, of two. It has occurred to me that Ezra Cornell, after having become closely associated with Andrew D. White, may have found it even less necessary than before, and on occasions perhaps even less possible, to say very much, however dryly.

There they were then, meeting in the Senate in 1864 for the first time—the two men, superficially so different: Ezra Cornell, the large, slow-moving, self-contained man, a bit dour and austere in appearance, as well weathered as a hickory knot by fifty-seven years of harsh experience in the world of men and affairs, knowing

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much, saying little; and Andrew D. White, the slight, nervously active, buoyant and vital man, a young intellectual Lochinvar out of the academic world, fully equipped and armored with ideas newly polished and pointed by the battle of the books, eager champion of good causes, expatiating and expounding at length with friendly confidence and persuasive facility. I like to think of them in those first days walking down the Capitol steps, or sitting in the plushy room of the Delevan House: Ezra saying little, content to listen, benevolently wondering what the talkative youngster may be good for, wondering whether, under all this bookish lore and spate of words, the fastidious professor may possibly have after all some saving grace of guts and common sense.

It turned out that the professor had plenty of both; and in spite of superficial differences, perhaps because of them, the two men were soon drawn together in close friendship. There was every reason why they should have been, for in all essentials they had much in common. They were both honest men, ambitious to use their wealth to do some striking good in the world; and they were both profoundly convinced that nothing better could be done in the world than to make freely available to the people in it the means of acquiring an education. But apart from all this, there were in January, 1864, particular circumstances that would have thrown them together whether they liked it or not. Ezra Cornell was made chairman of the committee on Agriculture; Andrew D. White was made chairman of the committee on Literature (that is to say, education); and both committees were bound to be concerned in the immediate question of how the Morrill Act could best be used in case, as seemed likely, the People's College failed to meet the conditions imposed by the act of May 14, 1863. We know that Ezra Cornell had formed, as a result of his experience in life and affairs, certain fairly definite ideas about education. It was a happy circumstance that Andrew D. White, having had a quite different experience, had formed quite different, although not necessarily

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conflicting ideas about it. What then was this experience, and what were these ideas?

Andrew Dickson White was born November 7, 1832, in Homer, New York.¹ His ancestors, on both sides, came to that region in the late eighteenth century from Massachusetts, the Whites from Munson, the Dicksons from Middletown. Great-grandfather Dickson was a member of the Great and General Court of Massachusetts Bay; Grandfather—"Squire"—Dickson was a prosperous business man and a member of the New York legislature. There was a tradition, which Andrew had not the time or the interest ever to verify, that the Whites were descended from the Peregrine White who came over on the Mayflower. Grandfather White was at all events once counted the richest man in Homer Township; and although a fire destroyed his mills and his fortune, his son Horace sufficiently retrieved the disaster to become the leading business man of the county. Andrew had not the advantage, therefore, of belonging to the great American aristocracy of poor boys who make good. "My first recollections," he says, "are of a big, comfortable house of brick, in what is now called 'colonial style,' with a 'stoop,' long and broad, on its southern side, which in summer was shaded with honeysuckles. . . . Spreading southward from this was a spacious garden filled with old fashioned flowers, and in this I learned to walk." Here, in this comfortable house and garden, he must also have learned to talk, and I like to think that his first intelligible word was "book."

Since the Whites were given to reading there were books enough in the house, and for the young Andrew the "Rollo Books," *Sandford and Merton*, and *The Children's Magazine* were thought the right sort of thing. In later life Mr. White could not remember a time when he could not read; but he could remember being frequently, at the age of three, in school, not as a pupil, but in charge of a colored servant who used to slip into the school in order to learn to read, and took the boy along, not knowing what else to do

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with him. He remembered also attending the public exercises of the Cortland Academy, and being impressed to the point of awe when he saw "Principal Woolworth, with the best students around him on the green, making astronomical observations through a telescope." When Andrew was seven the Whites moved to Syracuse; and there he was sent first to the public school, and then, at the age of twelve, to the preparatory department of the Syracuse Academy, where he had the good luck to be taught by "the best teacher of English branches" he was ever to know, Joseph A. Allen, who introduced him to proper selections from Shakespeare and Milton, and to Gray's *Elegy*, Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, and other classics much favored at the time.

That Andrew should go to college was no doubt preordained from the time of his birth; and as a preparation he was of course drilled in Andrews and Stoddard, and learned to translate Caesar and Virgil correctly—well enough at least to recognize that a fellow pupil was off the rails when he turned *Arma virumque cano* into "Arms and a man and a dog." Besides preparing his Latin and mathematics in school, he appears to have read at this time a great variety of books, among others the Waverley Novels, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Rollin's *Ancient History*, and Lander's *Travels in Africa*. Then, at the age of seventeen, came the first real frustration of Andrew's life.

He had set his heart on going to one of the famous eastern colleges; but his father, guided by the rector of St. Paul's Church, sent him to Geneva (Hobart) College, an Episcopal institution that claimed to be able, on account of the limited number of students, to "exercise a direct Christian influence upon every young man committed to its care." To this college, therefore, Andrew reluctantly went. There he found some excellent teachers, and a library of four thousand volumes, the largest collection of books he had ever seen. But he found also that the "Christian influence" was insufficient to prevent the boys from raising perpetual pandemonium—carried to the point, on one occasion, of burying a professor un-

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der a "heap of carpets, mattresses . . . and blankets," and, on another, of valiantly keeping the president himself "at bay with a shower of beer bottles."

At the close of the year, deciding that he had had enough of this sort of Christian influence, Andrew urged his father to send him elsewhere. Unfortunately, he had done very well in his studies, so that his father insisted on his returning to Geneva. It was at this point that Andrew showed what he was good for in a way that would have brought to the eye of Ezra Cornell, could he have known of it, the famous "twinkle." The incident is worth relating because it illustrates so well those qualities which, often exhibited in later life, were largely responsible for Andrew D. White's achievements. The qualities in question were precise knowledge of the end to be attained, inflexible determination to attain it, and rare diplomatic skill in dealing with those who might assist or oppose him.

On this occasion his purpose was to go to Yale College. He could not go without his father's consent. A frontal attack on his father having failed, he was therefore obliged, as he says, "to make a *coup d'état*." What he did was not a *coup d'état*, but rather in the nature of an elaborate and well-conceived flank movement. Shortly after arriving at Geneva in the fall of 1850, he quietly left the place and took refuge with a former tutor, then the principal of Moravia Academy, and there waited for the enemy to move. The enemy moved quickly, wrote at once to say that he was inexpressibly shocked, regarded Andrew's career as a thing wrecked, and refused to take any further interest in a son guilty of such flagrant disobedience. Andrew atoned for his disobedience by studying "more earnestly than ever before," but still waited, knowing all the time that there was, within the enemy country, a competent and reliable fifth-columnist. The fifth-columnist, needless to say, was Andrew's "dear mother," who wrote to him affectionately, and bided her time for three months until one day when Mr. White, who was passionately fond of music, expressed his intention of

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going to New York to hear the famous "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind. Then Andrew's dear mother, with that feminine guile with which there is no contending, suddenly exclaimed, as if it had just that moment occurred to her, "What a pity that the boy cannot hear this; how he would enjoy it." Poor Mr. White was no match for two such masters of finesse. "Tell him to come home and see us," was his eminently male way of giving in.

So Andrew came home, and it was understood that after Christmas his father would take him to Yale College. The battle seemed won, but was not quite; for on the train to New Haven Mr. White got into conversation with a student returning to Trinity College at Hartford—a college which, according to the student, was a most wonderful and truly Christian place. Still hoping, Mr. White tried once more. Would it not be well, he suggested to Andrew, to go on to Hartford and take a look at this Christian college before deciding definitely for Yale. Taken off his guard by this base betrayal of the Moravia Pact, Andrew countered by affirming confidently, without knowing anything at all about it, that Yale had "an infinitely finer library than Trinity." Mr. White then played his last card, threw in, as it were, the Old Guard: "My boy," he said, "if you will go to Trinity College I will give you the finest private library in the United States." Said Andrew roundly: "No, I am going to New Haven; I started for New Haven, and I will go there." A boy of eighteen! Mr. White gave it up. In thick, oppressive silence father and son rode on to New Haven.

Andrew remained at Yale College three years, and must, I think, have had a good time there. He was a member of the Psi Upsilon Society, and was variously known to his intimates as "Toots" and "Jock." He won a literary competition with an essay entitled "Greater Distinction in Statesmanship," for which he received a medal, very pleasing to his father, who wrote the boy that he would "rather have it than \$1,000 in money." He tried his hand at essays on other subjects, such as modern history and the dilemma of theology. He took part, I have grave reasons for believing, in the

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"Burial of Euclid" in November, 1852; and in the Commencement exercises he appeared in the afternoon, the sixteenth on the program, with a dissertation on "Ancient and Modern Oracles." ² There was surely nothing in all this to displease him; and surely he must have had a good time reading voraciously in the library that was "infinitely finer" than the library of Trinity College, in learning how to make friends and influence people, and in discoursing at length in a correct, easy manner on the state of the bright new world. I think he must have had a good time savoring Cicero and Seneca, and even, if the truth were known, in getting the better of Andrews and Stoddard.

So I think it must have been. But fifty years later, in the light of all that had occurred in the meantime, the Yale experience recollected, not altogether in tranquillity, seemed to Mr. White thin and unrewarding. There were, as he recalled, gifted professors—Woolsey and Porter, Silliman and Dana—whose personalities sometimes broke through the system which made "everything of gerund-grinding and nothing of literature." But only sometimes. Even Woolsey taught history by hearing men "recite the words of a text book," and that text book the Rev. John Lord's *Modern History*. During his whole time at Yale there was not a single "lecture on any period, subject, or person in literature, ancient or modern." Even the teaching of Silliman and Dana, masterly as he thought it, was "listlessly heard and grievously neglected" by the students, because the system put a premium on the neglect of all "studies that did not tell upon 'marks' and 'standing.'" One day a Latin tutor said to Andrew: "If you would try you could become a first rate classical scholar." To which Andrew replied: "Mr. B——, I have no desire to become a classical scholar, as scholarship is understood here." Such was Andrew's experience at Yale as he remembered it years later.

The remembrance was no doubt distorted a good deal by what he saw and heard in Europe during the next three years. A short visit to Oxford left its inevitable impression—an impression of

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ancient towers and cloistered gardens, of excellent, leisurely dinners and cultured, donnish conversation evoking the enigmatic, provocative spirit of John Ruskin and other famous men. In Paris he lived with a professor's family where nothing but French was spoken; and was soon listening at the Sorbonne to lectures on history and literature that confirmed his idea of what a university should be. In Paris he acquired a lifelong interest in the French Revolution—visited all the historic spots, practiced his budding French on veterans of the revolutionary wars hanging about the tomb of Napoleon, conversed with civilians old enough to remember the thundering Girondin orators of the Convention, and began to collect the library that would some day be at least one of the finest private libraries in the United States. From Paris he was fortunate enough to be taken, as an attaché of the American Legation, to reside for six months with Governor Seymour at St. Petersburg. There he witnessed the coronation of Alexander II, upon whom was devolved from Heaven all power over his subjects; and there he read Gibbon, made a special study of Guizot's *History of Civilization*, and discussed at length with Governor Seymour the ideas of Jefferson and the significance of American history.

Leaving the land of the Tsars, with his "democratic creed" much deepened and strengthened, he went to Germany and matriculated at the University of Berlin. There he learned German well enough to listen with some profit to professors then eminent—Lepsius, August Boeckh, Friedrich von Raumer, and Carl Ritter. There he also listened to the most famous of all historians, Leopold von Ranke, whom he could not follow, however, because the great man had the unfortunate habit of "becoming so absorbed in his subject, as to sink down in his chair, hold his finger pointing toward the ceiling, and then, with his eyes fastened upon the end of it, to go mumbling on in a kind of rhapsody" which even the German students, listening "as priests might to a Sibyl on her tripod," admitted they could not understand. It was an experience

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worth while, no doubt—such an experience as, according to William James, Harvard undergraduates enjoyed in listening to Royce, the experience of not at all understanding what was said, but of having a vague and salutary sense that something big was going on. From Germany he went to Italy, in intimate company with two Latin scholars, one of whom, Henry S. Frieze, was later, from his class room at Ann Arbor, to do more than any other man to “make classical scholarship a means of culture throughout our western States.” Italy was another world, and there he met James Russell Lowell, who was studying German literature in preparation for a professorship at Harvard. And so, in 1856, with three years of travel and study to his credit, Andrew returned to Yale College to “take the master’s degree in course.”

With so much knowledge and fruitful experience accumulated at the age of twenty-five, young Mr. White was bound, as any one can see, to become a professor. But where, and what of? Not that there was any difficulty in choosing a subject or in finding a place to teach it. While still at New Haven taking his master’s degree in course, his friends Gilman and Porter virtually assured him a position at Yale in the art department to be presently created.³ But he was less interested in art than in history, and in any case he felt that he would be “fettered” at Yale by the “old fashioned orthodoxy” of the system of instruction. One day, by some odd chance glancing in through the open door of a class room, he heard Francis Wayland, President of Brown University, say to some students: “The best field of work for graduate students is now the West.” That decided him. He went home and wrote to sundry friends saying that he was a “candidate for a professorship of history in any western college where there was a chance to get at students.” Two offers were shortly forthcoming—one of them from the University of Michigan, which was promptly accepted. Thus it happened that in October, 1857, Andrew D. White went to Ann Arbor determined to “get at students” by teaching them history in unconventional ways.

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It was certainly unconventional to prescribe, as text books, such formidable works as Robertson's *Philosophical View of the Middle Ages* and Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe*; unconventional to require students to read widely in such classics as Gibbon and Hallam, Lingard and von Ranke, Thierry and Macaulay. To master these was the student's task; the highest duty of the professor, needless to say, was "giving lectures"—courses of interpretative lectures on the grand subjects, such as "The Development of Civilization During the Middle Ages," "The French Revolution," and "German History from the Revival of Learning." The young professor ventured boldly to lecture without manuscript, or even notes—a venture that occasioned, on his first entrance to the crowded class room, some inner trepidation and weakness of the knees. But President Tappan, who was present to introduce the new professor, gave him the right clue: "Never stop dead; keep saying something." To keep saying something was never difficult for Mr. White; and was all the easier in this instance since he could always fill in by reading or exhibiting the "original sources" collected in Europe for his private library. With a little practice all went smoothly enough. Both lectures and lecturer were immensely liked by the students: for one reason because the lecturer was so obviously in love with his subject; for another, because the great object and point of the whole business was "to promote the better training in thought regarding our great national problems," such as the evil institution of slavery or the false doctrine of protection. The great object of it all was to present history as philosophy teaching by example the purposes of God in the world. There were, it is true, some "storms"; the doctrine of free trade, for example, being regarded by some Michigan Republicans as no essential part of God's purpose for the United States. But these were mere trifles. The period of six years at Michigan could be later recorded as "one of the most fruitful in useful experience and pregnant thoughts" that Andrew D. White had ever known.

The "pregnant thoughts" maturing in the mind of Andrew D.

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White at this time, and indeed throughout his life, came easily to birth. In the intellectual, no less than in the financial sense, Mr. White always lived, as one may say, in easy circumstances. There is no evidence that he ever experienced, even in the mildest form, any intellectual or spiritual crisis, or even that he was ever seriously troubled by doubt or disillusionment. He exercised in the happiest, unconscious way the will to believe. Never given to the critical examination of fundamentals, all of his thinking was in the nature of a facile manipulation of wide knowledge and varied experience in the support of certain general ideas which he, like so many men of his generation, appropriated from the main current of thought, and cherished with the emotional conviction that commonly sustains a religious faith.

These general ideas were what may be called the tenets of the nineteenth-century liberal-democratic creed. Mr. White believed that history is God's revelation to men, and that it can be properly understood only as a progressive, dramatic conflict between good and evil forces. He believed that the good would triumph ultimately, and that it had in his time already won the essential victories: evidence of which was to be found in the unprecedented progress recently made in material prosperity, in the increase and diffusion of knowledge, in the practical application of science to human needs, in the increase of humane sentiment and religious toleration, above all in the rapid spread throughout the world of democratic government in place of monarchical absolutism, of freedom of speech and the press in place of political and ecclesiastical censure of opinion, and of free economic enterprise in place of a regimented economy. The essential meaning of history, the essential test of civilization and the good life, was revealed in this progressive emancipation from age-old tyrannies and superstitions; so that any man might be sure that he was on the side of God and the right, might feel that he was leagued with the force, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness, by working for freedom of opinion in order that the truth might prevail, for freedom of status

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and occupation in order that careers might be open to talent, and for freedom of government in order that no man might be compelled against his will.

The doctrine of Karl Marx, that the emergence of democratic government and the freedoms it sanctioned was no more than a conditioned reflex induced by the economic factors of production—such a philosophy of history Mr. White repudiated as a blasphemy against God's beneficence and the nobility of human nature. Nothing would convince him that men did not make their own history, or that they could not by deliberate purpose make it fair or foul, or that the course of events had not in epochal moments been shaped, for good or ill, by the responsible action of great heroes or great villains. He believed that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, and that accordingly the essential condition for preserving the freedom of a republic was a sturdy and literate people, and leaders whose education enabled them to appropriate for themselves, and whose patriotism commanded them to place at the disposal of the community, the best that has been thought and said and done in the world. For a republic, therefore, the indispensable foundation was education—common schools for the people, colleges and universities for the leaders.

By this straight intellectual route Andrew D. White arrived, while teaching in the University of Michigan, at the most fruitful of his "pregnant thoughts"—the settled conviction that he could do nothing better with his talents and his fortune than to "aid in founding and building a worthy American university" for the increase and diffusion of learning and the intellectual and moral training of young men for leadership in the United States.

The beginning of this conviction Mr. White himself traced back to the day when, as a freshman in Hobart College, he came across Huber and Newman's illustrated book on the English universities. Poring over the "engraved views of quadrangles, libraries, halls, chapels—of all the dignified belongings of a great seat of learning," the limitations, both intellectual and aesthetic, of the drab

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little American college became so obvious and so disheartening that he began at once to build "air castles," to dream of a great American university "worthy of the state and the nation." In this impalpable structural enterprise he continued for many years, until it became an "obsession"; and his subsequent experience, at Yale and Oxford, in Paris and Berlin, served only to make the airy structure at once more vivid and more clearly defined. On the "queenly site above New York's fairest lake" it stood, this imagined university—with its distinguished professors in every field, its "library as rich as the Bodleian," its "towers as dignified as those of Magdalen and Merton," its "quadrangles as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John." Yes, and also, "as a leading feature, a gate tower . . . adorned with statues in niches and on corbels," and a "lofty campanile . . . a clock-tower looking proudly down the slope, over the traffic of the town, and bearing a deep-toned peal of bells."

Not that the great American university, although in outward semblance resembling Oxford and Cambridge, would in essentials be a mere imitation of them. In essentials the great American university would necessarily be adapted to American conditions and American needs of the present and immediate future time. Ample provision would, therefore, have to be made for other studies besides mathematics and the classical languages—provision for the "great modern literatures," for modern history, and for architecture; and also (as Mr. White's experience at the University of Michigan had convinced him) for natural science, the mechanic arts, and agriculture. These were for the time advanced, but not revolutionary ideas; but in two respects Mr. White would boldly commit the great American university to more radical policies. The great American university would be rigidly non-sectarian, and it would be hospitably co-educational.

One evening, it may have been in the year 1858, sitting before the fire in his Ann Arbor home, Mr. White related his dream to a distinguished visitor from the East—George William Curtis. In

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his address at the opening of Cornell University, Mr. Curtis recalled this midnight conversation. On that evening, he said, the young Michigan scholar, "in the warmth and confidence of his friendship, unfolded to me his idea of the great work that should be done. . . . Surely, he said, in the greatest state there should be the greatest of universities; in central New York there should arise a university, which, by the amplitude of its endowment and . . . by the character of its studies in the whole scope of its curriculum, should satisfy the wants of the hour." Of all this Mr. Curtis expressed his entire approval; and the two men, parting at a late hour, were encouraged to think that, since they lived "in a country open to every generous idea," the young scholar's dream "one day might be realized."⁴

Thus Andrew D. White's dream slipped into the realm of the practical. But in the realm of the practical the first hard fact was the need of money. Fortunately, Mr. White was himself not a poor man. Upon the death of his father in 1862 he inherited about three hundred thousand dollars; and the greater part of this he was willing to devote to the establishment of a university in central New York (preferably, as he then thought, in Syracuse, on the rising ground where Syracuse University now stands) if a wealthy philanthropist could be found to bear the main burden. Hearing from Samuel Joseph May that Gerrit Smith "had thought of endowing a university," Mr. White sat down on August 12, 1862, and drafted a long letter to him. In this letter, carefully revised and sent off on September 1, Mr. White set forth at length the need of a "worthy American university," solicited Mr. Smith's aid in founding it, and pledged himself to "throw in the bulk" of his own inheritance, which would be sufficient to found an adequate library, or "equip the finest observatory and laboratory in the world," and further promised that to Mr. Smith, if he would join in this noble enterprise, should go "all the glory."⁵ Unfortunately, Mr. Smith "gave reasons why he could not join in the plan"; and with this rebuff

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Mr. White's cherished scheme for the moment faded away, as he says, "like the baseless fabric of a vision." This was very much his state of mind when, in January, 1864, he took his seat in the Senate chamber at Albany. And there, as if by the Providence of God, was Ezra Cornell.

Mr. White had never before seen Ezra Cornell, but he had heard of him, and favorably, as a man who by his own efforts had acquired a fortune, and then instead of living at his ease was willing to serve the state in the legislature by promoting measures for the public good, and instead of hoarding his wealth for his family was prepared to spend it lavishly for the benefit of his fellow men.⁸ Such would describe, to Mr. White's way of thinking, the ideal citizen of a republic. For Ezra Cornell Mr. White had, therefore, the greatest respect and admiration. Nevertheless, the first thing he did in the Senate was to oppose with all his might Mr. Cornell's pet measure.

The measure had to do with the Morrill land grant, which had been given by an act of the previous session to the People's College on certain conditions. Since it seemed unlikely that the college would be able to meet the conditions, Mr. Cornell was still working, with his accustomed tenacity, to obtain at least some part of the grant for the Agricultural College at Ovid. To this end he asked Senator Folger, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, to draft a bill. January 11, 1864, Judge Folger sent the bill, with a covering note: "Inclosed herewith is the bill to amend the People's College law of last session. You will see that it is simply a restriction of that college to one half of the avails of the law. . . . You could have the bill introduced in my behalf [Mr. Folger was to be absent for a week] and get a reference to the Agricultural Committee if may be. . . . I suggest the Agricultural Committee for obvious reasons, *and also* because I am told that the chairman of the Literature Committee [Mr. White] is in favor of having the whole appropriation go to one institution." The next day, January

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12, Mr. Cornell "on behalf of Mr. Folger" introduced a bill "to amend Chapter 511 of the laws of 1863" by which the land grant had been given to the People's College.⁷

The chairman of the committee on Literature, Mr. White, at once and vigorously opposed this bill, on the ground that the educational resources of the state were already too much dispersed. There were, he said, "more than twenty colleges in the state, . . . not one of them doing anything which could justly be called university work." What the state needed was a real university. The Morrill land grant, kept intact and given to no matter which college, provided the opportunity for at least the beginning of such a university; to divide the grant would be to fritter it away and thereby defeat its purpose. When Mr. Cornell asked that the bill be referred to the committee on Agriculture, of which he was the chairman, Mr. White again objected, on the ground that the bill, being concerned with education, should properly be referred to his committee, the committee on Literature. There the matter rested until February 17, when there was presented to the Senate a resolution adopted by the State Agricultural Society on February 10, probably at Mr. Cornell's suggestion, protesting on behalf of the agricultural interests of the state against the grant to the People's College, and urging the legislature to rescind or modify its previous action so that the Agricultural College might "receive its full share of the noble grant." The next day, February 18, Mr. Cornell introduced on his own behalf another bill identical, except for a slight verbal change in the title, with the previous one. This bill was referred to a joint committee composed of the committee on Agriculture and the committee on Literature; and on this double-headed committee Mr. White, to use his own expression, "deliberately thwarted Mr. Cornell's purpose throughout the session," and prevented the bill from being reported.⁸

A vain or self-regarding man might well have been irritated by such prompt and vigorous opposition coming from a voluble young professor, bobbing up in the Senate before his newly won seat was

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fairly warm. But Mr. Cornell appears to have taken it all in good part, with his accustomed serenity. Instead of becoming irritated, he considered how he could meet the objection without letting the Agricultural College down. This he thought might be done by adding to the half of the land grant an equal amount from his own pocket. Saying nothing of his intention, he invited Mr. White to attend the coming meeting of the trustees of the Agricultural College at Rochester in September. The principal business of the meeting was the report of the financial committee, which turned out to be a "melancholy exhibit of the . . . bankruptcy" of the college. After various plans for relief had been discussed, Mr. Cornell read a short statement to the following effect. He had listened, he said, to discussions which have "developed the hopeless situation of the college, and shown so little encouragement of its future prospects, until I have come to the conclusion that the trustees would be justifiable in changing the location of the college if it can be done with the approval of the citizens of Ovid." If then the trustees would locate the college at Ithaca, he would give it a farm of three hundred acres within ten minutes walk of the post office, and donate three hundred thousand dollars, "on condition that the legislature will endow the college with \$30,000 per annum from the Congressional Agricultural college fund, and thus place the college upon a firm . . . basis, which shall be a guarantee of its future prosperity . . . and give to the farmers' sons of New York an institution worthy of the Empire State." This noble gift, we are told, "at once relieved the trustees of all embarrassment."⁹ It did not, however, satisfy the visitor, Mr. White. "Much to the disgust of the meeting," he says, "I persisted in my refusal to sanction any bill for dividing the fund, . . . but promised that if Mr. Cornell and his friends would ask for the *whole* of the grant—keeping it together, and adding three hundred thousand dollars, as proposed—I would support such a bill with all my might."

An obdurate fellow, this young White—so Mr. Cornell must have thought. And so, indeed, he was. But Ezra Cornell was an

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obdurate fellow himself, and one sure way to win his respect and liking was to stand up to him, always provided one had anything to stand up to him with. Mr. White had something. His argument against dividing the land grant was, after all, a sound one, and Ezra Cornell could appreciate the fact as well as any one. His conception of a great American university was a sound one too; and during the year 1864 Ezra Cornell must have heard him expounding it many times, and at length. He listened attentively, no doubt, and no doubt he said little. But if Mr. White could say a lot to good purpose, Mr. Cornell could listen and say little to good purpose also. Although slow to change his opinions, Ezra Cornell was a man of intelligence and imagination, quick to grasp the essentials whether of general ideas or grand enterprises; and I think he must have realized, much sooner than he let on, that Mr. White's idea of a university was both more comprehensive and better worth working for than his own relatively limited idea of a college primarily designed to give the sons of farmers instruction in agriculture and the mechanic arts. Not that he would forego his dream of an agricultural college; but I think he learned from Mr. White to see it as part of a larger institution, and all the more effective for being on the same campus with schools of literature, history, and political science. And if it should have a quadrangle of its own, as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John, so much the better; and if young Mr. White had a fancy for gate towers with statues in niches and on corbels, and a lofty clock-tower looking proudly down the slope and bearing a deep-toned peal of bells—well, that wasn't the main thing, of course, but there could surely be no harm in it.

At all events by January, 1865, Mr. Cornell had come, by whatever route, to Mr. White's way of thinking.¹⁰ His method of announcing the fact was characteristic. "I was one day going down from the State Capitol [this is Mr. White's account of it] when Mr. Cornell joined me. . . . After some little general talk, he quietly said: 'I have about half a million dollars more than my

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family will need: what is the best thing I can do with it for the State?" Andrew D. White could answer that one—no man better, since for ten years he had been looking for a chance to tell some rich man what he could best do with his money. "Mr. Cornell," he said, "the two things most worthy of aid in any country are charity and education; but, in our country, the charities appeal to everybody. . . . As to education, the lower grades will always be cared for in the public schools by the State; but the institutions of the highest grade, without which the lower can never be thoroughly good, can be appreciated by only the few. . . . It seems to me, then, that if you have half a million to give, the best thing you can do with it is to establish or strengthen some institution for higher instruction." He then discoursed at some length on the need for "a larger institution for such instruction than the State then had"—emphasizing the fact that "a university worthy of the State would require far more in the way of professors and equipment than most men supposed; that the time had come when scientific and technical education must be provided for in such an institution; and that education in history and literature should be the bloom of the whole growth."

To all this Mr. Cornell, so Mr. White says, "listened attentively, but said little," so that the matter seemed to end there. But not long afterward he came to Mr. White and said: "I agree with you that the land-grant fund ought to be kept together, and that there should be a new institution fitted to the present needs of the State and the country. I am ready to pledge to such an institution a site and five hundred thousand dollars as an addition to the land-grant endowment, instead of three hundred thousand, as I proposed at Rochester." With this announcement Mr. White was, as he says, "overjoyed"; and he immediately set about (no doubt with as much satisfaction as he ever experienced) to "sketch out a bill" for the new institution.

But meantime, as both men realized, it would be well before presenting any bill to the legislature to obtain as much support

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for it as possible. The Agricultural Society and the trustees of the Agricultural College could be trusted to follow Mr. Cornell's lead in the matter; if the trustees of the People's College, or some of them, could be won over, it would be a great help. To this end the trustees of the two colleges were invited to attend a meeting at Albany on January 12, 1865. So far as is known none of the trustees of the People's College accepted the invitation. One of them, Horace Greeley, had his reasons. "I do not choose to be present at Albany just now," he wrote to Amos Brown, the President of the People's College. "If Senator Cornell and the agriculturists will invite the People's College men to a conference with the single intent to blend the two bequests in one grand institution I will either attend or record my assent. If, on the other hand, he proposes to go his own gait, and thinks himself strong enough to override us, I prefer to wait here." ¹¹ Waiting in New York Mr. Greeley must have been reassured; for the meeting at Albany on January 12, after hearing Mr. Cornell's proposal, adopted a resolution in the very sense of his letter to Amos Brown. "Resolved, that a committee be appointed to correspond with gentlemen concerned in the management of the People's College, and with other persons prominent in the educational interests of the State, and invite them to meet the gentlemen concerned with the management of the State Agricultural College to take into consideration a plan for joint action in regard to the proffer of \$500,000 for educational purposes by the Hon. Ezra Cornell." ¹²

In accord with this resolution the committee, consisting of Andrew D. White, William Kelly, and B. T. Johnson, at once sent out invitations to the gentlemen concerned to meet in Albany on January 24. True to his promise, Horace Greeley was present at this meeting; but other trustees of the People's College, as Mr. White intimated with a certain amount of irritation, made excuses—"couldn't get there," the "trains wouldn't connect," and so on. ¹³ It was a disappointment, certainly, since the principal purpose of the meeting was to obtain some sort of official commitment

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from the People's College in support of the new institution. Nevertheless, the meeting made the best of a bad situation by adopting unanimously the following resolution: "Resolved, that it is the opinion of this meeting that the courses of the Agricultural and People's Colleges, be united in a single institution; that such institution be placed under a single Board of Trustees selected mainly from the Boards of the existing colleges, and that the institution thus formed be located in such place in the central part of this State as shall, at an early date, present the greatest pecuniary inducement. Resolved, that the institution thus formed ought to be the recipient of the endowment from the United States, known as the Agricultural and Mechanical College Fund." ¹⁴

This resolution could not of course be regarded as an official action by the trustees of the People's College, since Horace Greeley was the only one present to vote for it. But Mr. Cornell said that he "consulted the best and most influential" members of the People's College board, and that they "advised the new organization for the new institution"; and late in February Mr. White obtained, by correspondence, similar assurances of approval from four of the People's College trustees—Horace Greeley, Erastus Brooks, D. S. Dickinson, and Edwin B. Morgan. In addition, the Rev. Amos Brown, convinced that Senator Cook would do nothing more for him or for his college, and perhaps with his eye already on the presidency of the new institution, had assured Mr. Cornell of his support. ¹⁵

Meantime, Mr. White had "sketched out a bill" and had had several conferences with Mr. Cornell (at some of which Senator Folger was present as their legal adviser) in order to revise and amplify the sketch in such a way that it would be agreeable to both, and as little offensive as possible to hostile critics. The financial provisions of the bill were determined mainly by Mr. Cornell; the educational provisions mainly by Mr. White. In no essential matter was there any friction or difference of opinion between them. Who first suggested the name "Cornell" for the new uni-

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versity is not certain. In his *Autobiography* Mr. White says that he first suggested the name, and that Mr. Cornell "at first doubted the policy of it; but, on my insisting that it was in accordance with time-honored American custom, as shown by the names of Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth . . . and the like, he yielded." Mr. Cornell's own account, written in 1865, is that after consulting with some of the trustees of the Agricultural and People's Colleges they "tendered the name 'Cornell University.' The name I demurred to, fearing it would be charged that I have an undue ambition in that particular. I was met by assurances that it was eminently proper that the institution should bear my name, and I made no further objection." ¹⁶

One clause in the bill, which was later to provide the basis for the disastrous McGraw-Fiske law suit, Mr. White and Judge Folger were responsible for. "As we were blocking out the bill," Mr. White says in the first draft of his autobiography, "Judge Folger said to me, 'there must be a limit stated as to the amount of property the university can hold. How much will you make it?' My answer was, 'It is understood that the endowment of Harvard is about three million, and that of Columbia about the same. Why not adopt the same figure?' He thought it was very large, and so did I. Neither of us dreamed that the endowment of the university would ever reach any such sum, and both of us feared that its magnitude might alarm the legislature. Still we agreed to try it." ¹⁷ The magnitude of three million dollars as an endowment for a university! Fancy that *now*. Yet so the troublesome clause was inserted.

At one of their conferences, or it may have been at some other time, Mr. Cornell "expressed the hope that in the proposed institution every student might find instruction in whatever study interested him. Hence came," says Mr. White, "the legend . . . upon the university seal: 'I would found an institution in which any person can find instruction in any study.'"

Thus the essential features of the bill were agreed upon after

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many conferences in which Mr. White no doubt said a great deal, and Mr. Cornell no doubt said little, and that little dryly. With that agreeable task completed, it may very well have seemed to Andrew D. White that his long cherished dream of a great American university was about to come true, and to Ezra Cornell that his generous desire to spend his "large income to do the greatest good to . . . the poor and to posterity" was about to be realized. We can then perhaps imaginatively recover, and in some measure share, the profound satisfaction of both men when, on February 7, 1865, Mr. White asked and obtained leave from the Senate to introduce a bill entitled, "An act to establish the Cornell University."

V

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The leading object of the corporation hereby created shall be to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, including military tactics; in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life. But such other branches of science and knowledge may be embraced in the plan of instruction and investigation pertaining to the university as the trustees may deem useful and proper. And persons of every religious denomination, or of no religious denomination, shall be equally eligible to all offices and appointments.

CHARTER OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE somewhere remarks that official documents, whatever their nature, are not drafted in order that history may be written from them. How profound and disconcerting a truth it is, and how annoying to the historian that those who make history should be so indifferent to the needs of those who have to write it! To this melancholy reflection I am led by the difficulty of finding out exactly what happened to the bill introduced by Mr. White in the Senate on February 7, 1865, for establishing the Cornell University.

The official documents—that is, the Senate and Assembly Journals—say very little about the bill except that it was introduced, debated, amended, voted, and finally, on April 27, signed by Governor Fenton. Of the story behind this bare record—the very human story of interests threatened and passions aroused, of defamatory whisperings bruited about and cloak-room bargains struck and carried out, or not—of all this there is no hint. There is no record even of the formal debates, except Mr. White's speech, which was

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separately printed. The historian has, therefore, to look elsewhere to learn that the bill encountered strong and concerted opposition from pressure groups with interests to serve and votes to back them up, so that the sponsors of a generous gift for education, in order to get their measure passed in any form, had to pad about behind the scenes stirring up influential individuals to turn on the heat, had to suffer the charge of being "monopolistic" and "swindlers," had on their own account to do a little shopping in political bargains, had even, as a last resort, to scrape up \$25,000 in order to dispose of a spot of thinly disguised intercollegiate blackmail. That is not the way laws are supposed to be passed by the representatives of the people in a republic; but that was, in substance, the way the bill for establishing the Cornell University was maneuvered through the legislature of the State of New York.

The story begins with the introduction in the Senate, on February 7, 1865, of Mr. White's bill, the full title of which was: "An act to establish the Cornell University, and to appropriate to it the income of the sale of public lands granted to this State by Congress, on July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two."¹ The bill was printed, not in the Senate Journal for my convenience, but separately for the use of the Senators, and it is only by the accident that Senators Cornell and White preserved their copies that I am able to say precisely what the original bill contained.² The provisions of the bill are set forth in twelve sections, unsystematically arranged; but even a casual reading makes it clear that the purpose of the bill was to do three things: to create a corporation, to endow it with certain property, and to define the purposes for which the endowment should be used.

First, as to the corporation. "Ezra Cornell, William Kelly, Horace Greeley, Josiah B. Williams, William Andrus, John McGraw, George W. Schuyler, Hiram Sibley, J. Meredith Read, John M. Parker, and such other persons as may be associated with them for that purpose, are hereby created a body politic and corporate, to be known as the Cornell University, which university shall be

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located in the town of Ithaca" (Sec. 1). The management of the corporation was entrusted to a board of trustees, consisting of twenty-five persons. Of these, seven were trustees ex-officio—the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of the state, the Speaker of the house of Assembly, the Secretary of Public Instruction, the President of the State Agricultural Society, the Librarian of the Cornell Library, and the "eldest male lineal descendant of Ezra Cornell." The other eighteen members were to be the ten persons named in section one as incorporators, and eight others to be later "associated with them." And it was further provided that the "said board of trustees shall be so constituted, by election from time to time as the bylaws shall direct, as that at no time shall a majority thereof be of any one religious sect, or of no religious sect" (Sec. 2). Such was the corporation and the governing board of trustees.

Second, as to the endowment. To the corporation there was appropriated "the income . . . which shall be received from the investment of the proceeds of the sale of the lands" granted to the state by the Morrill Act (Sec. 6). But the appropriation was to be made only upon the following conditions: (1) that within six months after the passage of the bill the trustees could prove to the satisfaction of the Comptroller that the corporation possessed a "fund of five hundred thousand dollars at least, given by the honorable Ezra Cornell of Ithaca" (Sec. 6); (2) that the farm and grounds occupied by the corporation in Ithaca should consist of not less than two hundred acres (Sec. 3); and (3) that within two years after the passage of the bill the trustees should have made, "in respect to buildings, fixtures, and arrangements generally," provisions which the Regents of the University of New York would regard as fulfilling the requirements of the Morrill Act (Sec. 7). It was further provided that the corporation should not be permitted to hold "real and personal property" in excess of "three millions of dollars in the aggregate" (Sec. 5); and that the "university grounds, barn, work shops, fixtures, machinery, apparatus, cabinets and library shall not be encumbered, aliened or

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otherwise disposed of by the said trustees, except on terms such as the legislature of the State . . . shall have approved" (Sec. 8).

Third, as to the purposes for which the endowment could be used by the corporation. The purposes were twice defined. In Section 1: "The object of the corporation hereby created, is the cultivation of the arts and sciences and of literature, and the instruction in agriculture, the mechanic arts and military tactics, and in all knowledge." In Section 4: "The leading object as to the plan of instruction in said corporation shall be to teach such branches of learning as relate to agriculture and the mechanic arts, including military tactics. But such other branches of science and knowledge may be embraced in the plan as the trustees may deem useful and proper." The second definition, couched in the words of the Morrill Act, was no doubt designed to meet any charge that the purposes for which the land grant had been made were not being complied with; the first definition was designed to enable the trustees to interpret those purposes in the most liberal manner possible. The purposes for which the corporation could use its endowment were further defined and limited as follows: (1) "Persons of every or no religious denomination, shall be equally eligible to all offices and appointments" (Sec. 4). (2) "The said university shall . . . be subject to the visitation of the Regents of the University of New York" (Sec. 7). (3) "The corporation . . . shall receive annually one student from each assembly district of this state . . . and shall give them instruction in any, or all the prescribed branches of study . . . free of any tuition fee"; such students to be selected "in consideration of their superior physical and mental ability," to be determined by competitive examination, with preference given, when other qualifications were equal, "to the sons of those who have died in the military or naval service of the United States" (Sec. 9).

Having thus created a corporation, given it an endowment, and defined the purposes for which the endowment could be used, the bill provided that the act of May 14, 1863, by which the land grant

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had been appropriated to the People's College, "is hereby repealed" (Sec. 11).

The introduction of the bill, says Mr. White in his *Autobiography*, "was a signal for war. Nearly all the denominational colleges sent their agents to fight us at Albany; . . . stirred up the secular press . . . in the regions where they were situated, and the religious organs of their respective sects in the great cities."³ In a confidential letter to Professor E. W. Huffcut, Mr. White was more specific. "Hamilton College was represented . . . by the President who I think was Dr. Fisher, the treasurer, Mr. Williams, and the agent Dr. Goertner. Genesee College was represented . . . by the very powerful body of leading citizens from its neighborhood and by its chief speaker Professor Bennett. . . . Rochester University was perhaps the most vigorous of all in its action on the legislature through the public press. Dr. [President] Anderson became very bitter and Purcell the leading democratic editor kept up a series of most malignant attacks against Mr. Cornell, and all connected with him. . . . As to Hobart and Madison University my impression is that they were represented at some of the meetings before the committee, but their main activity was in the newspapers. The influence of Union against us was felt very strongly at Albany, . . . but Columbia did not, so far as I remember, take any part in the struggle against us."⁴

Mr. White was mistaken about "Purcell the leading democratic editor." Being a good Republican himself, he no doubt took it for granted that opposition to his plans would naturally come from his political rivals. As a matter of fact the leading Democratic paper, the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, of which William Purcell was the editor, defended the Cornell University bill against the attack made on it by the *Rochester Democrat*, which was the leading Republican paper, and whose editor was Robert Carter. The *Rochester Democrat* posed as the defender of the people against the "moneyed aristocrats"—the moneyed aristocrats being represented, in this session of the legislature, chiefly by the New York

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Central Railroad, which was supporting a bill for raising passenger fares, and Ezra Cornell, a rich man whose proposed university was designed to benefit the upper classes rather than the farmers and mechanics.⁵ According to the *Ithaca Journal*, the *Rochester Democrat* had at this time a special grievance against Ezra Cornell because, during the preceding summer, it had been in some way offended by the Western Union Telegraph Company.⁶

It may be that some grievance against the Western Union gave the *Rochester Democrat* its special zest for vilifying Mr. Cornell. But the rancor was not confined to the *Rochester Democrat*. In general the opposition of the small denominational colleges was characterized by a note of personal animosity that seems excessive, unless one may attribute it to a deep sense of defeat and frustration. There was, one must admit, good reason for such a feeling on their part. For three years the small colleges, impoverished as they were, had been sustained by the lively hope of getting at least some part of the land grant; and even after the entire grant had been given to the People's College they felt that all was not lost, since it seemed unlikely that the People's College would ever be able to meet the conditions on which the gift had been made. Then, out of the blue, after all these years of hopeful waiting, the Cornell-White project was suddenly sprung on them. It must have been infuriating, and the most infuriating thing about the project was its inherent merit—the fact that it would be approved by virtually every one who could take a disinterested view, since it presented a far better prospect of making a good use of the land grant than any existing college (unless it might be Columbia, the one important college that was not offended) could possibly offer. The situation reminds one of those English detective stories in which many distant, poor relations are waiting hopefully for the rich lord of the manor to die, when a long-forgotten, scalawag younger brother suddenly turns up from Australia. Such a situation, as every seasoned reader knows, is always conducive to mur-

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der, precisely because so long as the legitimate heir lives none of the expectants, not even the favored niece, has a look in.

The favored niece, in this instance, was the People's College. It had, what no other college had, at least a technically valid claim to present. Its friends could say, and did say, that the legislature had already given the land grant to the People's College on condition that it should provide the necessary buildings and equipment within three years; and that to take the grant away now, when some fifteen months of the allotted time remained, would be a flagrant act of "bad faith." ⁷ To ask for nothing but what the college already had, the nine points of the law, was good political strategy, and none the less so since it was the only thing that could be said for the college anyway.

Taking this technically defensive position, the friends of the People's College enlisted the support of all those who were, for any reason, hostile to the Cornell University bill. The defense was directed from Havana by the Hon. Charles Cook, no longer a senator, half paralyzed and irritable, but still able to command a good deal of political influence at Albany. His faithful lieutenants were Messrs. Hoyt and Webber, representatives in the Senate and Assembly from the Havana district, and Mr. Downs, the brother-in-law of Mr. Cook and the accredited agent of the People's College.⁸ The other colleges that were interested came to their support, not that they opposed the People's College less, but that they feared the Cornell University more. Other votes were also to be had—at a price. It happened that the New York Central Railroad was interested in a bill then pending for increasing passenger fares; and, according to Mr. White, the railroad lobby "made an alliance with the friends of People's College which soon became very formidable." ⁹

A formidable combination, certainly, but not unbeatable—at least in the Senate. The Cornell University had powerful backing also—Messrs. Cornell and White, a strong team, Mr. Kelly of the Agricultural Society, in a position to speak for the agricultural in-

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terests of the state, and many senators who were in a position to regard the bill solely from the point of view of its educational merits.¹⁰ From this novel point of view there was really nothing to be said for the People's College. Nearly two years had passed since the land grant had been appropriated to the institution, and yet, as a report of the Regents to the Senate on February 14 made clear, it had done virtually nothing to provide the necessary buildings and equipment, and had as yet no students at all except a few in the preparatory department. It was generally understood that nothing could be done until Mr. Cook provided the college with an adequate endowment; and as to that Mr. Cook had said that he would, and then had said that he wouldn't, so that no one could know for certain what he would do, but every one was quite sure that he would not do anything like enough.¹¹ The president of the college, Amos Brown,¹² and four of the trustees, including Horace Greeley, were so sure that he would do nothing at all that they were in favor of, even if not actively engaged in supporting, the Cornell University bill.¹³ Mr. White, in a powerful speech before the committee of the whole Senate, on March 10,¹⁴ made the most of this farcical situation by setting forth persuasively the advantages of the Cornell University plan and pointing out with devastating effect the futility of relying upon Mr. Cook or the People's College. Not the least effective of his points was a practical one—the danger of delaying the matter. The Morrill Act had given the state five years to appropriate the grant to an adequately equipped college. "Three years of the five," Mr. White pointed out, "are already gone. If this bill fails now we lose a year more, and then only one is left" to make the necessary provisions, failing which the grant is lost to the state altogether.

There was really no answer to Mr. White's argument. It was not, however, a question of arguments, but of votes. Good political guessers would have said that there were probably not enough votes against the bill to defeat it in the Senate, or enough in favor to carry it in the Assembly. The situation was thus favorable for

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making a bargain—a bargain in which Mr. Cook and his friends got a little face-saving and time-saving concession in the Senate, and Mr. White and his friends supposed the opposition in the Assembly would be greatly weakened. The bargain took the form of an amendment offered by the friends of Mr. Cook, to the effect that the land grant should be given to the Cornell University only if, within three months of the passage of the act, the People's College should fail to “deposit such a sum of money as, in addition to the amount already expended by them upon or for the purposes of the corporation, shall, in the opinion of the Regents of the University of New York, be sufficient to enable the said trustees fully to comply with the conditions” of the law of May 14, 1863. According to a statement signed by A. D. White, James A. Bell, and A. H. Bailey, the agents of Mr. Cook promised that if this amendment should be adopted “they would withdraw all opposition to the [Cornell] bill in all its stages in the Assembly and elsewhere”; and it was in consequence of this promise that Messrs. White, Bell, and Bailey, “and other senators, voted for the amendment.”¹⁵ Accordingly, on March 16 the bill as amended was reported from the Committee of the Whole to the Senate, approved by the Senate, and sent to the Assembly for concurrence.¹⁶

During these proceedings it was a matter of great regret to Mr. White that the bill had not the active support of Charles J. Folger, chairman of the Judiciary Committee and one of the most influential members of the Senate. Personally Mr. Folger heartily approved of the bill. He had, in fact, helped Mr. White and Mr. Cornell to draft it. He was a close personal friend of both men, and could, like the Walrus and the Carpenter, deeply sympathize. But unfortunately there was, within his district, a small college, and more important still the defunct State Agricultural College at Ovid; so that as a senator Mr. Folger could not officially approve of a bill that took something, however valueless, from his constituents, while giving something likely to be very valuable indeed to the constituents of Senator Cornell. Mr. White recognized that

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such things are not done, and had resigned himself to his friend's dilemma when there occurred one of those odd chances that Mr. White always regarded as providential—always, that is to say, when they served his purposes. The odd chance was the sudden death of Dr. Sylvester D. Willard, and how Mr. White managed to make a providential use of it is relevant to this story.

For many years Dr. Willard, and before him Dr. Beck, had been deeply interested in the treatment of insane persons in the state, the condition of such persons, huddled together in overcrowded county poorhouses, being generally recognized as nothing less than a scandal. Session after session Dr. Beck—and, after his death, Dr. Willard—had appeared before a committee of the legislature to speak in favor of a bill to create an adequate institution—an institution which Dr. Willard proposed to call "The Beck Asylum for the Chronic Insane." Session after session the bill had failed to pass. And then one day early in April, 1865, Dr. Willard, while making one more passionate plea, suddenly fell dead on the floor of the committee room.¹⁷ The startling event made a profound impression. For some days a certain solemnity pervaded the legislative halls, and the legislators were troubled with an unaccustomed, if perhaps salutary, sense of guilt.

Andrew D. White, shrewd politician that he was, saw at once that a sense of guilt among senators was a force, not themselves, that could be used for righteousness. "I sought out Judge Folger," he says, "and showed him his opportunity to do two great things. I said: 'It rests with you to remedy this cruel evil which has now cost Dr. Willard his life, and at the same time to join us in carrying the Cornell University bill. Let the legislature create a new asylum for the chronic insane of the state. Now is the time of all times. Instead of calling it the Beck Asylum, give it the name of Willard. . . . Place it upon the Agricultural College property on the shore of Seneca Lake in your district. Your constituents are sure to prefer a living State Asylum to a dying Agricultural College, and will support you in both measures.' This suggestion Judge Folger

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received with favor. The Willard Asylum was created, and he became one of our strongest supporters." Doctrinaires, Mr. White said, "might stigmatize our conduct in this matter as 'log-rolling' . . . even call it a 'bargain.' They may call it what they like." ¹⁸

So they may. I am myself not greatly attached to particular words, but I must confess that if this was not a bargain I don't know what to call it. But bargains are made every day, and no harm in them if both parties are satisfied and no one else injured. In this instance no one was really injured—unless it might be the village of Ovid. At least one hard-grained native of that place was convinced that his home town had decidedly got the short end of the stick. Forty years later, recalling the transaction to Dr. J. Franklin Jameson, he said, with a plaintive bitterness that the passing years had done nothing to assuage, "Why, a university would've been worth three insane asylums!" It is not for me to say that he was wrong. Certainly at that time the inmates of the university were more numerous, the cases milder, and the patients, on the whole, from the president down, rather less in need of constant supervision. Let me then herewith, for Ithaca, apologize to the neighboring village of Ovid, and, for Cornell University, salute the Willard Insane Asylum as a kindred institution, and pass on to the main point. The main point is that the bargain was struck, and thereafter Senator Folger actively and effectively supported the Cornell University bill.

The bill certainly needed all the support it could get. The promise of Mr. Cook's agents "to withdraw all opposition . . . in the Assembly and elsewhere" was not kept; so that there was more, and far more embittered opposition in the Assembly than there had been in the Senate. The tactics adopted by the opposition was to refer the bill to the Committee of Colleges and the Committee of Agriculture, and let it die a peaceful death there unless its friends could muster a two-thirds majority to force the joint committee to report it. Whether this was the best tactics or not is uncertain: it at least gave Mr. Cornell and Mr. White a month to

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organize their forces and, as Mr. White says, "to enlighten the great body of the senators and assemblymen." To this end Mr. Cornell "invited them by squads, sometimes to his rooms at Congress Hall, sometimes to mine at the Delevan House. There he laid before them his general plan, while I dwelt upon the need for a university in the true sense of the word." The method reminds one of the academic procedure—the large class divided into small discussion groups; and no doubt the professor gave to each group the substance of the speech he had already delivered in the Senate. To enlighten the community at large, this speech had been published in the *Albany Journal* and, through the efforts of Mr. Cornell, widely circulated in pamphlet form. Besides, Mr. Cornell and Mr. White went to New York to solicit editorial support from the newspapers, and obtained from some of them, especially from Manton Marble of the *World*, favorable editorial comment.¹⁹

Not content with these measures, Mr. Cornell arranged, unwisely as it turned out, for an unofficial debate before the joint committee of Colleges and Agriculture. The meeting, at which many besides the members of the committee were present, was held in the Assembly chamber. For this occasion Mr. Cornell had hired a lawyer to speak for the bill, and Mr. Cook had obtained the services (whether hired or not) of another to speak against it. Unfortunately, the speech of Mr. Cornell's lawyer, according to Mr. White, "was cold, labored, perfunctory, and fell flat. The speech on the other side was much more effective; it was thin and demagogical, but the speaker knew well the best tricks to catch the average man. He indulged in eloquent tirades against the Cornell scheme, as a 'monopoly,' a 'job,' a 'grab,' and . . . denounced Mr. Cornell as 'seeking to erect a monument to himself,' hinted that he was planning to 'rob the State'; and, before he had finished, had pictured Mr. Cornell as a swindler and the rest of us as dupes or knaves."

Through this tirade of abuse Mr. White kept his seat, I can imagine, only with difficulty; but Mr. Cornell took it all in his accus-

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tomed manner—calmly, and with a wry humor. Once, when the lawyer's "invective was especially bitter," he turned to Mr. White and said: "I am not sure but that it would be a good thing for me to give the half a million to old Harvard College in Massachusetts, to educate the descendants of the men who hanged my ancestors." ²⁰ Even more characteristic was Mr. Cornell's truly Quaker impulse to clear his own conscience by asking himself what truth, if any, there might be in the charges. The lawyer's claim that he was a wealthy patron of a university designed to serve the rich rather than the poor touched Mr. Cornell deeply—it "led me," he says, "to examine my own position to ascertain if it was obnoxious to the charge of aristocracy." ²¹ The record of this self-examination is a longish document, in Mr. Cornell's hand, now preserved among his papers in the Cornell University Library. In this document Mr. Cornell sets forth, with simple sincerity, certain facts about himself and his activities: to the following effect—that he was brought up in the Quaker faith, and had departed "from the direct line only by marrying a lady who was not a member of the society, and by falling into the popular form of direct speech"; that he had always been essentially a farmer and a mechanic, and had acquired his wealth by following those pursuits and not by speculating in stocks, not even the stocks of telegraph companies, or by lending money for profit; that his "ruling desire" was to devote the bulk of his property to do the most good to the working classes of his native state; that the Cornell University (so named by no wish of his own) was designed to that end, the evidence of which is to be found in its proposed course of study and in the composition of its board of trustees, which consists of "three mechanics, three farmers, one manufacturer, one merchant, one lawyer, one engineer, and one literary gentleman," besides state officers and persons officially associated with the educational affairs and institutions of the state. From all of which Mr. Cornell concluded that it would be difficult to find a man more closely identified with farmers and mechanics than he had always been, or to found a university more

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obviously designed to serve their interests, or to "select a board of trustees more likely to foster and protect [their] interests than the one selected." This document was Mr. Cornell's reply to the tirade of Mr. Cook's lawyer, and as such was laid before the joint committee—with what effect, who shall say?

I should guess, however, that it had very little effect—less, certainly, than the tirade of Mr. Cook's lawyer, since the members of the joint committee, adopting the very words of the tirade, posed as "protectors of the State against a monopoly and a swindler," and on that ground were less disposed than ever to report the Cornell bill to the Assembly. For the friends of the Cornell bill, therefore, success or failure depended, not upon securing a majority of the Assembly to vote for the bill, which they could probably do, but upon securing the two-thirds majority required to compel the committee to report it, which there was far less chance of their being able to do. In the end they succeeded in getting the necessary two-thirds majority; not, however, by professing good motives and presenting valid arguments, but by exerting political pressure at two strategic points, and making one substantial and costly political bargain.

The bargain was made with Genesee College, located at Lima about thirty miles south of Rochester. A bill was pending to give the college its "fair share" of the land grant, which its supporters estimated at one hundred thousand acres. In this demand the college was supported not only by the leading citizens of the locality, but by the Methodist Church throughout the state, which favored the grant because Genesee College was a Methodist institution, and in any case was strongly opposed to the Cornell University bill on the ground that, professing to be a non-sectarian institution, it would in effect be hostile to religion. Unless this powerful Genesee-Methodist block of votes could be converted or bought off the chances of getting the Cornell bill out of the committee were none too good. On the other hand, the friends of Genesee College were none too sure of getting any part of the land grant even if the

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Cornell bill was defeated. The situation was obviously conducive to bargaining, and a bargain was in fact arranged.

The terms of the bargain are known, but as to which of the two parties proposed it there are two conflicting accounts. One account was given by Angus McDonald, the attorney for Genesee College. Speaking in the Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868, he remembered that when the Genesee College bill for one hundred thousand acres of the land grant was before the Assembly, "Senator White came to us and assured us" that the Senate would on no account divide the land grant, whatever the Assembly might do; "and he suggested whether Genesee College would not be willing to take an endowment for an agricultural chemistry department, and let the [Cornell] bill pass the legislature. . . . He said that Mr. Cornell was willing to endow an agricultural chemistry department with fifteen thousand dollars. After consultation, he said he was . . . willing to say that it should be twenty-five thousand dollars. . . . At the request of friends of Genesee College that was put in the bill as a condition." ²²

A different account was given, at the same time in the Constitutional Convention, by Judge Folger. He remembered that the Cornell bill "went to the Assembly where it met with a very formidable opposition from the agents of a religious body of this state. It became apparent to the friends of Mr. Cornell and the Cornell University . . . that the bill was likely to fail or they be compelled to divide the funds, by reason of the opposition of the friends of Genesee College, while the friends of Genesee College, on their part, did not feel too certain of success. Then a proposition was made outside of the legislature, in the lobby, that if Mr. Cornell would pay twenty-five thousand dollars to the Genesee College, the friends of that institution would withdraw their opposition to the [Cornell] bill and it might go through the Assembly. . . . After consultation was had among the friends of the Cornell University, one of them advised Mr. Cornell that the condition exacted by Genesee College had better be complied with. . . .

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But Mr. Cornell (and I approve and applaud him for it) then said that he would do nothing in the dark; that if he was to give this sum for the withdrawal of the opposition it should be made public, and inserted in the bill, so that no man could accuse him of any underhand work. At the request of a particular friend in the Assembly representing his district (Mr. Lord of Tompkins) that condition was, by unanimous consent, inserted in the bill, and in that shape it passed the legislature.”²³ This account of the transaction is better supported than the other. It was vouched for at the time by Mr. Alvord; and it is in all essential respects the same as that given by Mr. White in his *Autobiography*.

Such was the bargain with Genesee College. At the time it seems to have been generally understood that the bargain was first proposed by the friends of Genesee College, and that the bargain itself went, as political bargains go, rather beyond the limit. According to the *Ithaca Journal* (not, to be sure, an unprejudiced witness) “one common burst of indignation from the press of all parties was aroused by this outrageous demand. . . . The professorship will be known as the ‘Blackmail Professorship,’ the ‘Captain Kydd Professorship,’ the ‘professorship of the Christian Foot Pads.’”²⁴ Whatever the demerits of the bargain, it had at least the merit of being faithfully kept; and it probably did more than anything else to obtain the required votes for the Cornell bill. But two other bargains, or, let us say, political pressure applied discreetly in two instances, had much to do with it also.

One of these instances had to do with the New York Central Railroad bill for an increase in passenger fares. The *Rochester Democrat* charged the Cornell crowd with making a deal with the railroad lobby. The *Utica Herald* denied this, on the ground that “Senator White has spoken and voted against the Railroad bill in all its stages.” Mr. White himself had this to say about the matter: “It was I who, when . . . the lobby of the New York Central Railroad opposed us, held up the New York Central bill . . . and persuaded the Senate not to take it up until justice was done

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us.”²⁵ This cannot mean that Mr. White promised to vote for the New York Central bill, because he in fact voted against it. What I take it to mean is that Mr. White, who was a director on the New York Central Board and well acquainted with the Vanderbilts, let it be known to the proper persons that the railroad bill would be held up in the Senate until after the Assembly ordered the Cornell bill reported out of the joint committee; and some credit is given to this assumption by the interesting fact that just two days after the Assembly ordered the Cornell bill reported out of the committee the railroad bill was passed by the Senate.

The other instance of political pressure exerted to good effect is related by Henry B. Lord, the Assembly representative from Tompkins County. “I was then serving,” says Mr. Lord, “on the Committee of Ways and Means. To that committee had been referred a bill providing for the first appropriation for the erection of a new State Capitol. Sufficient opposition to the bill had developed to cause some nervousness on the part of its friends. My associates on the Committee of Ways and Means were all in favor of the bill chartering Cornell University. . . . All proposed to unite with me in notifying certain influential friends of the Capitol Bill that the Committee of Ways and Means could and would hold back the Capitol Bill so long as the Joint Committee held our university bill. Precisely how much influence this notification had, I, of course, cannot say. But I do know that when I moved that the House direct the Joint Committee forthwith to report the bill chartering Cornell University, . . . several friends of the Capitol Bill, among whom the Senator from Albany was conspicuous, were most busily engaged in bringing in their friends to vote for the pending motion.”²⁶

Mr. Lord’s motion instructing the joint committee to report the Cornell bill was offered on April 12. The friends of the bill were well enough assured by then that less than a third of the members would vote against the motion; but they realized that some of those who were committed not to vote against it would prefer

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to evade all responsibility by not voting at all. When the roll was called such members would no doubt be found conveniently slipping away into the cloak-room. In this strategic position, accordingly, certain friends of the Cornell bill placed themselves and, as Mr. White says, "fairly shamed the waverers back into their places." Thus by virtue of squad lectures and newspaper propaganda, and bargains made, and political pressure applied where it would do the most good, and valiant Horatios guarding the breach in the cloak-room, the Cornell University bill was forced out of the joint committee by a vote of 70 to 22.²⁷ Among those voting against the motion was the representative from the People's College district, Lorenzo Webber, who had promised Mr. White that all opposition would be withdrawn. But of the twenty-two men who voted against the motion none were from Genesee County, the home of Genesee College, none from Albany where the new State Capitol was to be erected, and only one or two from those regions where the New York Central Railroad may be supposed to have had some influence in persuading representatives that corporate profit is a public benefit.

With this decisive vote recorded, the fight for the Cornell University bill was virtually won. On April 13 the bill was reported from the joint committee to the Assembly, referred to the committee of the whole, and from the committee, with the Genesee College bargain amendment inserted, reported back to the Assembly. The amended bill was approved by a vote of 79 to 25 on April 21, concurred in by the Senate on April 22, and finally signed by Governor Reuben E. Fenton on April 27. On the next day, April 28, the incorporators met for the first time, in the Agricultural rooms at Albany, and did what then could be done—appointed William Kelly chairman and Victor Rice secretary, resolved to accept the "conditions privileges and powers" conferred upon them by the act just passed, directed Ezra Cornell to consult with the Comptroller in respect to the land scrip, and elected seven additional trustees: Andrew D. White, Charles J. Folger, Abram B. Weaver,

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George H. Andrews, Edwin D. and Edwin B. Morgan, and Erastus Brooks.²⁸

This was all that could be done for the time being. Section thirteen of the act of incorporation declared that "this act shall take effect immediately"; but to the trustees this declaration must have carried something of the flavor of a sour joke, since the act itself made it possible for the People's College to retain the land grant by depositing, within three months, a sum of money which the Regents should declare sufficient for this purpose. In the event that the deposit required should be made, the act for establishing the Cornell University would presumably still be in effect, but to the founders and friends of the institution it would have ceased, to all practical intents and purposes, to have any effect whatever.

Another three months to wait, then, and nothing to be done! The strain, on Mr. White at least, was severe indeed. As often happened when there was something he wanted very much, but could for the time being do nothing about, he became so nervous that he could not sleep. On July 10, when about to leave for Rye Beach for a much needed rest, he somehow became convinced that the Regents had been got at by the People's College men, and were deliberately postponing the business of determining what sum the trustees of the People's College should be required to deposit. On that day he sent off a frantically worded telegram, followed by an equally frantically worded letter, to Mr. Cornell, saying he "greatly feared" that "all was lost," had reason "to believe that influential Regents would be glad to have the whole business fall through," and implored Mr. Cornell to do something about it.²⁹

Mr. Cornell, as usual, took it more calmly, hadn't heard anything to be alarmed about, didn't think there was much in it. Mr. Cornell had by now, I think, not only a great respect for Mr. White's intelligence, but a deep affection for the man, and looked upon him very much as if he were a favorite son to be entirely trusted in matters of importance, but apt to go off the handle about trifles, and needing, on such occasions, to be calmed down a bit. From his

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letters to Mr. White on this occasion and later I get the impression that on such occasions he is saying in effect, if I may transpose his formal phrases into a vulgar key: "Now, now, take it easy, young fellow, take it easy; everything is going to come out all right." More often than not Mr. Cornell was right; and so he was on this occasion. The next day, at Albany, Mr. White had a conversation with the Secretary of the Board of Regents, Mr. S. B. Woolworth, who, as he says, "greatly relieved my mind in regard to the late action of the Regents."³⁰ This was surely an understatement. Mr. Woolworth must, I should think, have relieved Mr. White's mind altogether, since he must have told him in effect that the Regents, so far from having been got at by the People's College men, had for two months been making a further investigation, and on July 7, three days before Mr. White feared that all was lost, had in fact reached a decision. The decision was that if the trustees of the People's College did not, by July 27, deposit the sum of one hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars, the People's College would automatically lose the land grant.³¹

Mr. White, still suspecting a trick in it, went off to Rye Beach. The days slipped by; July 27, although to Mr. White's impatience it may have seemed a little late, arrived on schedule time, and still no deposit of one hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars, or of any sum at all, had been made by the trustees of the People's College. The land grant would thereupon become the property of the Cornell University as soon as the other conditions imposed on the corporation were complied with. This was promptly enough done. Mr. Cornell transferred to the corporation his bond, secured by Western Union Telegraph stock, for five hundred thousand dollars, and wrote his check for twenty-five thousand dollars in favor of Genesee College. And so in the year 1865, after many disappointments and delays, the Cornell University came into existence.

It existed, but as yet in a somewhat intangible form. It consisted at that time of a charter, a board of trustees, a farm of two hundred

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acres, and an endowment of approximately one million dollars. But as yet it had neither president nor faculty nor students, nor any buildings, nor a library, nor laboratories, nor equipment of any kind. All of these essential men and things had yet to be assembled, institutionally organized, and informed with a corporate purpose and personality. For the next three years Ezra Cornell and Andrew D. White, with unremitting effort, with unsurpassed zeal and intelligence, and with a resolution that would not be denied, gave themselves to this congenial task—the task of providing the Cornell University incorporated with a habitation and a home.

VI

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I hope we have laid the foundation of an institution which shall combine practical with liberal education, which shall fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufactories, for the investigations of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor.

EZRA CORNELL

IN 1865 the Town of Ithaca had a population of something more than seven thousand inhabitants, the Village of Ithaca considerably less than that. Except for some scattered dwellings on South Hill, on upper Seneca and Buffalo Streets, and a small settlement clustered around the mills at the Ithaca Falls, the Village was chiefly confined to the region bounded by the Inlet and by Green, Aurora, and Mill (now Court) Streets. It was served by one railroad, the Ithaca and Owego, and a line of steamboats running on daily schedule between Ithaca and Cayuga Bridge at the northern end of Cayuga Lake. It could boast of various industries—plaster and flour mills, tanneries, a carriage manufactory. It could boast of two newspapers, the *Journal* and the *Democrat*; and of two hotels, of which the Ithaca House was the more ancient and the Clinton House the more splendid, being then regarded by many as one of the finest, both for service and for architecture, in the state. The most conspicuous building in the Village (and by some no doubt regarded as the most beautiful, since there is no accounting for tastes) was the Cornell Library at the corner of Seneca and Tioga Streets. The most distinguished citizen was Ezra Cornell, whose farm, purchased in 1857, and recently donated as the site of the new university, extended eastward from the cemetery between the

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Cascadilla and Fall Creek gorges. The old farmhouse, known as Forest Park, and still standing at the Stewart Avenue entrance to the campus, was occupied by Mr. Cornell. Since there were no bridges over either of the gorges, it could be reached only by a road branching off from what is now University Avenue and skirting the north side of the cemetery. This road did not extend beyond the farmhouse; but there was a road running from the farmhouse along what is now Stewart Avenue to what is now University Avenue but was then merely a country highway from Ithaca to Free Hollow (Forest Home), Dryden, Cortland, and Syracuse.¹

For the inhabitants of Ithaca the fifth of September, 1865, was a day out of the ordinary, a day to take note of and make preparations for, since there were on that day and the following, lodged at Mr. Cornell's home at Forest Park and at the Clinton House and meeting for conference at the Cornell Library, more distinguished strangers than the village had ever before had occasion to welcome. There was His Excellency, Reuben E. Fenton, the Governor of the State, His Honor, Thomas G. Alvord, Lieutenant Governor of the State, the Honorables Andrew D. White and William Kelly, Senators, and Abram B. Weaver, Assemblyman, and Messrs. Erastus Brooks, editor of the *New York Express*, and Edwin B. and Edwin D. Morgan. None of these men had ever been in Ithaca before. Not that the village was, for that time, inaccessible. Mr. Erastus Brooks, for example, could leave New York early in the morning and arrive safely at Ithaca some twelve hours later by either of two recommended routes—either by the Erie Railroad to Owego, changing there to the Ithaca and Owego, and leaving the train at the station at the head of the Inlet; or by taking the New York Central through Albany and Syracuse (where he might have been on the present occasion joined by the Honorable Andrew D. White) to Cayuga Bridge, and thence by steamer to the landing on the Inlet (near the present Johnson boathouse), where he could take a bus, or, for a consideration, a more luxurious vehicle, along

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Willow Avenue to the Clinton House.² The Village of Ithaca was not inaccessible, but it was after all a small place, and not being on either of the main routes of travel east and west, the Erie and the New York Central, was but little known to the people from other parts of the state, and little visited by them in the way of business or pleasure.³ The distinguished men who arrived there on the fifth of September, 1865, were not there in the way of pleasure, or in the ordinary way of business either, but in the way of business quite unusual, and regarded by them all as unusually important. They had come to Ithaca to attend the first meeting of the full Board of Trustees of the Cornell University.

The distinguished visitors were well received—a “serenade one evening, followed by a grand reception the next attended by large numbers of the best people.” They were of course taken up the hill, and were of course, as they were expected to be, properly impressed by the magnificent view. There was indeed nothing else there to be impressed with, unless it might be Mr. Cornell’s prize bulls, contentedly browsing on the hillside, or lumbering heavily down the ravine (where Mr. Cornell’s statue now stands) to drink at the spring. What must have impressed them most, I should think, was the absence of all they were required, within two years, to assemble on that rough hillside—adequate buildings and apparatus for teaching agriculture and the mechanic arts, and a competent faculty for teaching them. As yet, not a spade sunk for any foundation—not even the site for any building as yet chosen. With so much to do and so little time to do it in, there was, nevertheless, not much that the trustees could do at this meeting on the fifth of September. Permanent officers were elected—Ezra Cornell, President; Francis M. Finch, Secretary; George W. Schuyler, Treasurer. The necessary committees were appointed—an Executive Committee, a Committee on Buildings, a Finance Committee, and a one-man committee, consisting of Andrew D. White, to draft bylaws. But the chief thing done was the acceptance of Mr. Cornell’s proposal to give his bond to the trustees for \$500,000, at seven per cent inter-

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est, to be secured by Western Union Telegraph stock to the amount of \$700,000 par value, and the appointment of a committee to lay this proposal before the Comptroller of the State for his approval.⁴

This was little enough, but more was being accomplished than the formal record indicated. Mr. Cornell had already hit upon a grand idea which, after infinite effort and repeated discouragements, was to provide the university with an endowment far in excess of his original gift of five hundred thousand dollars. As early as March 27, 1865, he had written to Mr. W. A. Woodward: "What I desire . . . is . . . for the Treasurer of the University to take the funds I shall give the institution and buy the scrip of the Comptroller at 50 cents per acre, and enter the lands in the name and for the interest of the university."⁵ By holding the lands until they were worth, say, two dollars per acre, the university would have ultimately, in addition to its present annual income of approximately forty thousand dollars, an endowment of about two million dollars. This was Mr. Cornell's grand idea, and he desired Mr. Woodward, as a man with seventeen years of experience in locating and selling western lands, to say whether the idea was a practicable one.

Mr. Woodward replied that the idea was entirely practicable, provided some experienced person—he meant himself—were employed to manage the business. Meantime, Mr. Cornell, finding the trustees not disposed to buy the scrip and locate the lands for the university, had decided to do it himself. On his invitation Mr. Woodward came to Ithaca, late in November, to discuss the matter, and on that occasion, as he remembered some years later, was introduced to some of the trustees—Messrs. Finch, McGraw, Andrus, Williams, and Schuyler—in order to get them interested in the project. But Mr. Woodward found them unwilling even to listen to him. "They were devoting their talk to something else all the time. . . . After . . . about twenty minutes one said: 'It's tea time.' Another said: 'I must go, I never keep my wife waiting.'" Mr. Cornell, fortunately, was less interested in his tea than in his

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grand idea. He gave Mr. Woodward an estimate of his wealth, and asked him whether with that amount he could "carry the matter through." Mr. Woodward assured him that there would not be "any difficulty about that"—always provided, of course, that he would employ Mr. Woodward to manage the business for him.⁶

The upshot of these preliminaries was that Mr. Cornell made an agreement with the Comptroller to buy the scrip and locate and dispose of the lands for the benefit of the university, and for the next six years employed Mr. Woodward as his agent for selecting and entering, with the scrip which Mr. Cornell turned over to him from time to time, valuable pine timber lands in Wisconsin. Mr. Cornell's agreement with the Comptroller was precise and businesslike; his agreement with Mr. Woodward, unfortunately, was not.

Mr. Cornell's arrangement with the Comptroller was made legal by an act of the state legislature, April 10, 1866, which authorized the Comptroller to sell the scrip for not less than thirty cents per acre to the Trustees of Cornell University, or, in case they declined to purchase, to any one who would comply with the condition laid down. Since the trustees declined to purchase, Mr. Cornell signed a contract with the Commissioners of the Land Office, August 4, 1866, which provided: (1) that Mr. Cornell should purchase the unsold scrip (813,920 acres) at thirty cents per acre; (2) that, since thirty cents per acre was one half of the market price of the scrip at that time, Mr. Cornell should, as the lands were sold from time to time, pay into the state treasury an additional thirty cents per acre; (3) that these two sums, totalling sixty cents per acre, should be regarded as the price received by the state for the scrip, and should be kept in a separate fund known as the College Land Scrip Fund, the income of which should be paid to the university and used by it according to the terms of the Morrill Act; (4) that the net profits received by Mr. Cornell from the sale of the lands—that is, the price received minus the sixty cents per acre paid for the scrip, and minus the cost of taxes, management, and the like

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—should be paid into the state treasury and kept as a separate fund to be known as the Cornell Endowment Fund, to be used (as the court decided later) for any of the purposes defined in the charter of the university.

By this arrangement the College Land Scrip Fund would be what the state received for the sale of the scrip—\$594,000, which was approximately what it had commonly been supposed the state might realize from the scrip. But the Cornell Endowment Fund would be whatever Mr. Cornell could make for the university by locating the land and holding it for a higher price as a private business enterprise. In a letter to the Comptroller, June 9, 1866, Mr. Cornell estimated that this fund would ultimately amount to \$1,600,000, which would give the university a total endowment of \$2,944,000. The estimate was conservative, being some two million dollars less than the university ultimately realized from the sale of the scrip and the lands alone.⁷

For the present, however, and for some twenty years to come, these advantages existed only on paper, and even on paper they were not regarded as impressive by any one except Mr. Cornell. If Mr. Cornell's estimate of the ultimate value of the lands was too conservative, his estimate of the immediate difficulties of carrying the enterprise was, characteristically, far too optimistic. He was misled in part by Mr. Woodward, who professed a great interest in Mr. Cornell's noble educational plans, but whose real interest was only, with Mr. Cornell's aid, to make a fortune for himself. But he was also misled by an excessive confidence in his own judgment, and by the essential honesty which disposed him to be extremely casual in his business methods. The enterprise in which he employed Mr. Woodward as his agent was a difficult and complicated one, involving the handling, it was estimated, of some two million dollars; and yet we look in vain for a formal contract defining what either principal or agent should render or receive. The two men appear to have drifted into an ill-defined gentleman's agreement, in which there was no intention on either side to de-

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ceive, but only every opportunity to do so, nor any wish for misunderstanding, but only the remotest chance that it would not occur. When it did occur it was so complete and baffling that thirteen hundred and eighty-eight pages of testimony were required to determine whether, and in respect to what matters, there had ever been a meeting of minds between principal and agent. In the end it was decided that that there had been, and that Mr. Cornell owed his agent a good many thousand dollars more than he thought he did.⁸

What Mr. Cornell really owed Mr. Woodward for his services no one will ever know. But the melancholy fact is that with more careful inquiry at the beginning he could have dispensed with the services of Mr. Woodward altogether. The real work of selecting and locating the lands was done by Mr. Herbert C. Putnam, a clerk in the land office at Chippewa Falls, and after a few years Mr. Cornell learned this fact and thereafter dealt directly with Mr. Putnam. But apart from the money wasted on Mr. Woodward, the necessary expense of carrying the enterprise, even with the most prudent management, was far more than Mr. Cornell had realized or could afford; so that in 1867, having purchased and located 511,068 scrip acres, he found it impossible to purchase any more. At that time virtually nothing had been realized by the sale of the lands; and when the university opened in 1868 no one but Mr. Cornell, unless it might be John McGraw and Henry W. Sage, had much interest or any real faith in the grand idea. Certainly President Andrew D. White, a majority of the trustees, and so far as is known all of the faculty would have been glad to sell the lands for whatever they might bring and so get rid of a bad business. Nevertheless Mr. Cornell, encumbered by commitments too casually undertaken, but inspired by an indomitable faith in his grand idea, insisted with admirable if sometimes irritating stubbornness, and with a good measure of success, on holding the lands for a better price. To Mr. Cornell, therefore, must go the initial credit of providing Cornell University, in spite of

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the best efforts of its trustees, its president, and its faculty, with an endowment far larger than any one had originally dreamed of.⁹

Since Mr. Cornell and Mr. White had taken the leading part in getting the university incorporated, it was taken for granted by the board of trustees that they should take a leading part in organizing it; and as Mr. Cornell was commonly deferred to in matters of business and finance, Mr. White was commonly deferred to in matters of educational policy. Mr. White was accordingly made chairman of the Committee on Plan of Organization; and on November 21, 1866, he presented to the Board a report of forty-eight pages, which was adopted, and finally put into effect with such slight modifications as may be noted in the first General Announcement issued in 1868.¹⁰

The report was based on three general ideas: first, that agriculture and the mechanic arts should be regarded as "the peers of any other" subject; second, that the conventional liberal-arts course should be extended to include history, political science, and modern literature; and, third, that students should be given, in respect to choice of studies and in respect to conduct and discipline, a greater degree of freedom than was then customary in most colleges.

In accord with these principles, the subjects of study were organized in two divisions—"The Division of Special Sciences and Arts" and "The Division of Science, Literature and the Arts." The first division comprised nine "departments"—Agriculture; Mechanic Arts; Civil Engineering; Commerce and Trade; Mining; Medicine; Law; Jurisprudence, Political Science, and History; and Education. These departments were, so to speak, in the nature of potential professional schools, designed to fit students for the particular profession indicated, although the department of Jurisprudence was especially recommended for training political leaders in the state and nation, who had hitherto been lacking, the report said, in "the commonest rudiments of knowledge." The second division was intended to replace the traditional

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college course. Instead of the single required classical course, there were to be three "general" courses, a "science" course, and an "optional" course. The three general courses were variations of the conventional classical course, permitting the substitution of German and French for Greek and Latin, and including a good deal more of history, political science, and modern literature. The science course was designed as preliminary training for those who expected to become proficient in science, engineering, or agriculture. The optional course was a concession to those who were not sure what they wanted, and accordingly permitted them, as one may say, to close their eyes and choose three "subjects of study from all those pursued in the university."

The courses of instruction thus offered called ultimately for forty-six professors—twenty-four in the first division, twenty-two in the second; but for a beginning it was thought that twenty-six would be sufficient. These should naturally be the best obtainable, since the quality of a university depended fundamentally on the quality of its faculty. Unfortunately, the best were not to be had on permanent tenure at any price. "To take Agassiz permanently from Cambridge," the report said, "we must outbid the Emperor of the French, who has recently offered the most tempting prizes in vain." This being the case, Mr. White's happy idea was to secure as permanent, or "resident," professors the most promising young men to be had—at salaries ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500—and trust them to achieve distinction; but also to invite men who were already distinguished, such as Agassiz or James Russell Lowell, to give courses of lectures for a term or a year as temporary or "non-resident" professors. This would enable students, faculty, and the citizens of Ithaca to hear many of the most famous scholars in the country, to their own great advantage and to the enhanced prestige of the university. To begin with, the report suggested sixteen resident and ten non-resident professors.

The report discussed at length a great variety of other matters. It touched upon the desirability of providing remunerative manual

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labor for students; fixed the student's fees at \$25 per year; opposed the dormitory system; suggested that if the citizens of Ithaca charged too much for board the university might build a dining hall and lease it to the students; emphasized the importance of obtaining, for the faculty, men of "general culture" and good manners, although a few eccentrics might be tolerated on account of special distinction in scholarship; declared roundly that "the university will not tolerate feuds in the faculty"; made much of establishing close personal and social relations between members of the faculty and students; and made even more of the library as an indispensable part of any great university. The report closed by laying down, as a general test and touchstone of success in all their efforts, the principle enunciated by Wilhelm von Humboldt and elaborated by John Stuart Mill: "*The great and leading principle is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity.*"

Nothing was said in the report about the admission of women. Both Mr. Cornell and Mr. White approved of it in principle, but many of the trustees did not, and in any case it was thought to be out of the question until proper buildings could be provided for them. For a fleeting moment there seemed to be a bare chance that this might be done at once. On April 9, 1866, Mr. Henry Wells wrote to Ezra Cornell asking where he could get a good quality of brick for a building in which, as he said, "I intend to educate wives for your boys, allowing they bring good recommendations." Four days later Mr. Cornell replied—very specifically about the brick; but then took the liberty, as an old friend, to make a suggestion; which was that, since there were already too many small colleges, it would be better all round if Mr. Wells, "instead of building one more college at Aurora," should "build at Ithaca the female department of Cornell University." The hope that this might come to pass—it must have been pretty thin at best—was extinguished on May 22, when Mr. Wells gave his reasons for preferring to build a female seminary at Aurora.¹¹

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In his report on Plan of Organization Mr. White raised the question of whether the ideal American university needed to have a president, decided, for good or ill, that it did, and recommended that the Board of Trustees should proceed, at an early day, to choose one. But it seems that without Mr. White's knowledge the question had already been decided; for almost immediately after Mr. White's report had been accepted, the board voted unanimously that "the Hon. Andrew D. White of Syracuse" should be the president of the university.

This action, Mr. White says in his *Autobiography*, came to him as a complete surprise. If it seems to us a little incredible that the action should have surprised any one, no doubt the reason is that, looking back on the history of the institution, we find it difficult to suppose that any one else could have been thought of, much less seriously considered, as first president of Cornell University. But in human affairs nothing is predetermined until it has occurred; and in 1866 it was not a foregone conclusion that Mr. White should be chosen. Several other men were in fact thought of in that connection. There is some reason to believe that the Rev. Amos Brown, President of the People's College, thought of himself.¹² Mr. White had various men in mind. He had heard a prominent Massachusetts judge mentioned for the position, and would, he confessed, prefer him "to a clergyman," but thought rather better of Governor Andrews, who had recently declined the presidency of Antioch College. But the man he preferred to all others was Martin Anderson, President of Rochester University, whom he recommended strongly to Mr. Cornell.¹³ To all of Mr. White's suggestions in the matter Mr. Cornell listened, but no doubt said little. On one occasion, however, he did go so far as to say that he had a candidate of his own, but preferred not to say who it was until the next meeting of the Board of Trustees; and at the next meeting he presented the name of Andrew D. White in "a very earnest speech."

I think it unlikely, therefore, that Mr. White could have been

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altogether unprepared for the action of the Board in electing him president of the university. Whether surprised or not, it seems that he nevertheless protested against it, and finally accepted the position, as he says, with "the distinct statement that I should be regarded simply as a *locum tenens* . . . until some man more fit for it could be secured." Reasons for this attitude he had in plenty: he was too young and had not the necessary experience; he was already overburdened with affairs—was at the time a professor in the University of Michigan, State Senator, president of a Syracuse bank and director in two other banks, a director in the New York Central and Lake Shore Railroads and in the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, and the executor of two large estates. Besides, so he said, whatever ambitions he had (and in this he was supported by his wife) were "in the direction of accepting a professorship which had been tendered me at Yale." ¹⁴

So he said. And throughout his life he said repeatedly that he was a scholar, and that his greatest desire was to be relieved of business and public affairs, and retire to the peace and seclusion of his study where he could do his proper work. I have no doubt that Mr. White believed, in connection with all this, what he said when he said it. But I am under no such compulsion; and I note that he never declined an offer of any prominent official position, unless it might be a tentative offer—which was in fact not pressed—to be a candidate for Governor of New York, and even this he did not absolutely decline. Mr. White said himself that his chief ambition in life was to aid in founding a great American university; and I cannot think that anything ever pleased him more than to be chosen the first president of Cornell, or ever gave him more satisfaction in later life than to feel that he, no less than Mr. Cornell, or even more than Mr. Cornell, was the effective creator of Cornell University—nothing, that is, unless it might be his appointment as Minister to Germany, where he remained three years hobnobbing with Bismarck and receiving the applause of German universities, in spite of repeated requests from Ithaca

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that he should by all means return and take up his duties as president, because the university was in a fair way to be ruined by constant and resounding clashes between the rigid conscience of Vice-President Russel and the impervious mind of Henry W. Sage.

Andrew D. White was not, in the modern sense, a scholar, but what used to be called "a gentleman and a scholar"—a very fine gentleman indeed, and in the sense intended a very fine scholar. But scholarship was not his profession. He was essentially a crusader, by profession a promoter of good causes, primarily interested in changing the world rather than in understanding it. If he had been taken at his word, and left severely alone to the peace and seclusion of his study, he would inevitably, in no long time, have been bored by it; the strain occasioned by the silence and lack of bustle would have aggravated his dyspepsia and his sleeplessness, so that he would of necessity have welcomed, for its sedative effect, the first offer to serve on the busy board of no matter what railroad or canal company, or, all else failing, would have found relief in rushing out to organize something—perhaps a society for the promotion of activities and preservation of excitements. Ambitious as he was to aid in founding a great American university, and being neither unintelligent nor shrinkingly modest, I cannot think that he did not know, down in his bones, that he was destined by circumstances and his own interests and abilities to be the first president of Cornell University.

After his election, at all events, we hear nothing more from him about the *locum tenens* business or the Yale professorship, or about anything at all except the pre-eminently important business of organizing the new university, of which no aspect, human or otherwise, was to him indifferent. We find him writing innumerable letters, sending any number of telegrams, and interviewing all sorts of people in the effort to further that business. We find that he has a finger in every pie, and definite and passionate convictions about every matter, whether it be the best type of

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mind for teaching English literature, or the best type of lens for the great telescope, or the high importance of at once securing the Anthon classical collection, or the proper level for the water tables of the main buildings. We find him suffering from sleeplessness and often on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown—but never more than just on the verge. And so I think we may conclude that he cared for nothing so much as for Cornell University, that he delighted in nothing so much as in being its first president and in working day and night to make it fair and fine. And for my part I also conclude that, for all his frail body and fits of nervous irritability, he must in fact have had a constitution with the flexible toughness of whang leather, besides vitality enough for three ordinary men.

Nothing engaged Mr. White more in these days, or was thought by him to be of so much importance, as the selection of the first faculty. "Better a splendid and complete faculty in a barn," he maintained, "than an insufficient faculty in a palace."¹⁵ Not content with letters of recommendation, he went to New York, New Haven, and Cambridge to consult personally and confidentially with the leading professors about the most promising young men in the various fields of study. While at Cambridge he visited Agassiz at his cottage at Nahant, and had with him long and fruitful conversations "regarding the merits of different candidates." Information obtained in this way, he said, was worth more than "cartloads of credentials"; and to make still more sure he always insisted, if it was at all possible, on having a personal interview with the candidate before making an appointment.¹⁶

The first promising young men to be nosed out in this fashion—or at least the first to be formally appointed, February 13, 1867—were Evan W. Evans, in mathematics, and William C. Russel, in modern languages. September 25, of the same year, four additional appointments were made—Burt G. Wilder in natural history; Eli W. Blake in physics; G. C. Caldwell in agricultural chemistry; and James M. Crafts in general chemistry.¹⁷ Young

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Mr. Wilder, a favorite pupil of Agassiz, apparently took a greater interest in Cornell affairs than the others. In accepting his appointment, he let Mr. White know, in a formal and somewhat elegant English style, that all he had heard of the Cornell University, and of Mr. White himself, "assures me that with the position thus offered is given an opportunity to work in science more than ordinarily advantageous." In November following his appointment he came to Ithaca, was taken by Mr. Cornell for a ride in his dilapidated buggy, and expressed himself delighted with the place and the people, especially with Mr. Cornell, of whom he could not "say enough in admiration." He felt sure, notwithstanding "the smallness of the salary" (which required him to ask for an advance the first year) that a man who could not do good work under such conditions could not do it at all. But one small thing gave him some concern—what type of seats had they planned for the class rooms? He was convinced that "the easier and more comfortable the seats, the closer is the attention and the more rapid the progress of the pupil." He therefore took the liberty of making a rough sketch, in a letter to Mr. White, of the proper type of seat, which had a cushion in the back of it pliable to the natural curve of the spine, and of the improper type of seat, which had only a rigid, unaccommodating bend in it.¹⁸

From Professor Caldwell, after his appointment, Mr. White obtained information about three other promising young men—Messrs. Miles, Prentiss, and Rothrick. Professor Caldwell thought Mr. Miles the ablest of the three, although he perhaps depended "too much upon a text book"; but he thought Mr. Prentiss a first-class man too, and "more agreeable and elegant than Mr. Rothrick." It seems that Mr. Miles, though tempted, declined an offer, so that the "agreeable and elegant" Prentiss was in fact appointed. From Cambridge Mr. Cornell and Mr. White heard good things of a certain James Oliver, who "for character and purity of life is unsurpassed," and sure to have a great influence on the young, being himself most agreeable and always ready

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to do good.”¹⁹ Young Mr. Oliver was not appointed at this time, but the mistake was remedied later, and for many years James Oliver was the delight of his colleagues, and always ready to do them good, one favorite way being to provide them with the most engaging examples of professorial absent-mindedness ever recorded on any campus. Another unsuccessful candidate, recommended by Moses Coit Tyler, was Hiram Corson, who much desired to come to Cornell because of the prospect that the English language and literature would there “be given the prominence which its transcendent importance demands.”²⁰ Mr. Corson also was appointed later, and also became a center for the collection of myths.

And so with infinite care, but with some mistakes, the first faculty was selected. Yet with every effort to hasten matters it was found that the time allowed for organizing the university was too short, so that it was necessary to get, by legislative act, permission to postpone the opening for one year—to October, 1868.²¹ Even so, as late as February 13, 1868, only ten resident professors had been appointed. Meantime Mr. White had been exerting his persuasive charm to induce the settled and the distinguished to accept temporary appointments. At the close of a letter to Mr. Cornell he announces some good news — “P.S. I have secured James Russell Lowell, the foremost literary man in the United States, as one of our non-resident professors.”²² Five other men were likewise beguiled—Louis Agassiz in natural history; Fred Holbrook in agriculture; James Hall in geology; George W. Curtis in recent literature; and Theodore W. Dwight in constitutional law. All six were appointed by the board on February 13, 1868. It was voted by the board that the term of office, unless otherwise determined, should be two years; but Mr. White, allowing always for human frailty even among the distinguished, got a rider inserted to the effect that the agreement might be terminated at any time “for delinquencies.”²³

Mr. White was one of those fortunate if sometimes irritating

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persons who are predisposed to think that men or things chosen by themselves must be of the best—any doubt on that score being a bar to their going ahead and being right with undiminished confidence. He was therefore well pleased with the men he had chosen for his faculty. He did not, however, go so far as to suppose that these excellent young men, housed in Mr. Cornell's barn, even with the prize bulls removed, would make a "complete university." Additional buildings were necessary; and in the matter of buildings Mr. Cornell was also concerned. Mr. Cornell had been interested in the construction of Cascadilla Place, originally designed as a water cure; and now, as the principal stockholder, he was instrumental in acquiring the gray, massive, prison-like structure as a university dormitory for housing faculty and students. But the main buildings were to be located between the two gorges. As a site for the buildings, Mr. White rather preferred the lower level (no doubt because better adapted for a quadrangle) where the Baker Dormitories now are; but in deference to Mr. Cornell the present site, in spite of its uneven surface and very likely because of the more "magnificent view" afforded, was chosen. For the general plan of the buildings Mr. White was responsible. His idea was a quadrangle, with the main buildings around it, and other buildings to come later located in attractive disarray elsewhere. The architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who was consulted, protested strongly against this plan, on the ground that it was too conventional and did not sufficiently allow for future expansion.²⁴ His idea was something less obvious—a plan that would aim at "unity in variety." But Mr. White had too long dreamed of "quadrangles as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John" to abandon his idea; and so he had his way, and we have the quadrangle—which is well enough. If in the arrangement of the other buildings no great unity is discernible, the buildings themselves at least cannot be said to lack variety.

The plan called for the immediate erection of two buildings on the west side of what would ultimately be the quadrangle—the

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present Morrill and White (then called the South and North University) Halls, with a more imposing structure between them to be erected later. Mr. Cornell's role was to scrutinize the estimates for construction, which he commonly found too high (and maybe the result of collusion), and to supervise the work in progress, which he commonly thought was slower than it need be.²⁶ His chief aim was always to keep expenses down; so much so that he thought it hardly worth while to fill in the ravine sufficiently to bring White Hall on a level with Morrill—a decision that outraged Mr. White's sense of architectural fitness, and would, moreover, have given to the quadrangle something of the aspect of a shoot-the-chutes. "Now I beg of you," Mr. White writes in great distress, "*asking it as a favor*, that the water tables be put absolutely on the same line. . . . We are building for centuries and should not subject ourselves to the charge of stupidity from those who come after. . . . You had your way about the site—yield to the majority in regard to this slight matter of the level." ²⁶ Mr. Cornell must have yielded—a good deal at least; for although the water tables of Morrill and White are not, judging by the naked eye, absolutely on the same line, the "stupidity," that is the difference, is not glaring. So the work was pushed on; but as late as February, 1868, although Morrill was virtually finished, White Hall had as yet been raised only to the first storey.²⁷

With the buildings unfinished and the faculty still far from complete, Mr. White was preparing, late in 1867, to spend three months in Europe for the purchase of books and apparatus, when suddenly, to his excited imagination, disaster loomed on the horizon. A constitutional convention was then sitting at Albany, and an amendment to the report of the educational committee had been moved, to the effect that the revenues of the College Land Scrip Fund should be given to Cornell University each year only if specifically appropriated by the legislature—the implication of the amendment and the intention of its movers being that the legislature might, at any annual session, for good reason, refuse

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to appropriate it to the university. The amendment was supported by the friends of the People's and Genesee colleges and of Rochester University, the leader being Mr. Angus McDonald, former attorney for Genesee College. In the debates the history of the struggle for the Cornell charter in 1865 was reviewed, and the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, and other newspapers hostile to Cornell University, made this the occasion to exhibit Mr. Cornell once more as an unscrupulous land-grabber whose chief aim was to rob the state for the enrichment of the Cornell family. Mr. White, much alarmed, sent telegrams and wrote letters to many people, and interviewed many more, convincing some but finding others "shaky," or entirely "ignorant of the issues involved." The "malignant," as he said, was McDonald, whom "no argument could reach for the reason that he kept raising new questions and befogging the whole matter."²⁸ Fortunately, the cause of the university was ably defended in the convention, especially by Judge Folger, who offered a substitute to the amendment to the effect that the revenues of the College Land Scrip Fund should be appropriated to Cornell University "so long as said university shall fully . . . perform the conditions of the act of the legislature establishing said institution." The substitute amendment was adopted, the storm subsided, and in April, 1868, Mr. White left for Europe.

In Europe Mr. White had—there is no other word for it—the time of his life. His long and frequent letters to Mr. Cornell, written in such a rush as to be scarcely legible and barely literate, have something of the quality of breathless lyrics. "Have tried," he writes, "to shake off thoughts of the university, but 'distance lends enchantment to the view,' and I can think of nothing else." He was hardly settled in Paris before reporting: "Have begun my book purchases, and am postponing as to apparatus"; expect soon to investigate agricultural and technical schools; "will have an interview with the Minister of Public Instruction and some of the professors here"; have written to Professor Russel and Mr.

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Fiske for a meeting; also to arrange for an interview with young Sibley, and "if he is at all the man for any of our professorships I shall 'gobble him up'"; have decided to "go personally and make the purchases of apparatus and chemicals at Heidelberg, Darmstadt, Erfurt, and Berlin." ²⁰ All in one letter. And so with every letter—a dozen things done or to be done. And he does it all, and from time to time sends home great packing cases filled with books or apparatus (for which there is, of course, not enough money, more of which, of course, he accordingly asks for and obtains from Mr. Cornell). Not the least of his triumphs was that, in England, he managed to "gobble up" Professor Goldwin Smith, and Dr. James Law, a highly recommended young man in veterinary science. And so he returns, flushed with success, and pleased more than a little when it was jocosely said that he had brought back, as part of his European spoils, "an Oxford professor and a Scotch horse doctor."

When Mr. White returned from Europe there were less than three months to run before the great event for which three years of unremitting effort had been a preparation—the opening of the university in October, 1868. It was a time of belated reminders of last things to be done, of last-minute activities, conveying an impression of every one so rushing about that nothing seemed to be accomplished. When the students began to arrive, at all events, it could not be said that anything was really ready. White Hall had been raised only to the second storey; the shops and laboratory, although usable, were not finished; and even Morrill Hall still lacked doors to some of the rooms, and such like convenient accessories. Of the twenty-six professors, a number were not officially appointed until the day before the opening, and accordingly were not in Ithaca. Those who were on the ground were busy unpacking the cases of books and apparatus that had arrived, and wondering where others that should have arrived had got to. But more than anything else they were wondering what

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they could do with the quite unexpected number of students that had suddenly descended upon them.³⁰

They had wanted students, of course, and had taken care to make known the advantages of the new university. Mr. Cornell had sent the first General Announcement to some three hundred prominent persons, and to more than a thousand newspapers; had also, much to Mr. White's dismay, published an article in the New York *Tribune* stating that students desiring to pay for their education while getting it could do so by giving half of their time to manual labor for the university.³¹ But what no one quite realized was that the university had been advertised in other and more effective ways than these. For three years it had been heralded or denounced throughout the country as a novel and somewhat questionable "experiment," as "the Cornell idea"—an institution in which any person could find instruction in any subject, and in which professors would be appointed and students welcomed whatever religion they might profess, or even if they professed no religion at all. The university had become well known for the friends, and still better known for the enemies it had made; had become, in short, famous or infamous as the case might be for its "radicalism"—its frank and publicly announced departure from conventional academic and religious ideas.

For these reasons the professors on the ground found themselves, at the end of September, saddled with the largest entering class ever admitted to any American college up to that time—412 students: more than twice as many as could be provided with lodgings, together with the professors themselves, in the dormitory known as Cascadilla Place; and more than three times as many as could be conveniently taught in the class rooms available. Nevertheless, the professors on the ground, all sold on the "Cornell idea," got down to it with good will and determination. Entrance examinations were held in the dimly lighted basement of the Cornell Library. One professor made a brave show of teach-

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ing the French language to a class of two hundred; the department of geology was confined to a single room adjoining one of the coal cellars; and demonstrations in natural history were conducted in the vacant space next to a furnace. The library, in Morrill Hall, could not be used as a library, being in constant demand for holding recitations; and in any case, whatever it might be used for, it suffered the disadvantage of being always permeated with the variegated odors that seeped up from the basement, where the chemists prepared their instructive stench³².

Whether, for the students, the promise of the "Cornell idea" was sufficiently attractive to outweigh its present inconveniences, I cannot say. One student at least—Mr. J. Y. Davis from Auburn—liked it well enough. He liked his room, nine by twelve feet, in Cascadilla Place, because it gave him a magnificent view, because it was exactly opposite the lift where he got his coal, and nearly opposite the elegant dining room where excellent meals were served—four kinds of meat with fish, and pie for dessert; he liked marching in military order to and from the campus; liked the chimes, the largest bell reminding him of the one on the big factory at Auburn; he liked the reception given on inauguration day in the Cornell Library, where the ladies appeared "in full dress costume with the Grecian bend"—it was "like the Bazaar except for the booths." Mr. Davis liked it all very much, but admitted that "as yet everything is in an uproar and confusion."³³ Maybe he liked it for that reason. Maybe students like uproar and confusion when there is a chance that something new and interesting may come out of it.

The uproar and confusion probably died down a little on Wednesday, October 7—the day set for the inaugural ceremonies, for which elaborate preparations had been made by the faculty and the citizens of Ithaca. The citizens, for their part and for the evening, had arranged a "Jubilee" in the streets and a grand reception in the Cornell Library assembly room. The faculty had arranged for the inaugural ceremonies in the assembly room in

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the morning, and in the afternoon for the formal presentation of the chime of bells donated to the university by Miss Jenny McGraw. The weather, no doubt by some special dispensation of Providence, was fine, although a high wind was blowing.³⁴ At ten in the morning the assembly room, gaily decorated, was filled with students and faculty, citizens of the town, and distinguished visitors invited for the occasion. The ceremonies began with an address by Mr. Cornell—a very brief address, as we might guess; brief, but still the most pregnant address of the day, since it developed in simple terms the thesis: “The individual is better, society is better, and the state is better, for the culture of its citizens; therefore we desire to extend the means for the culture of all.” Following Mr. Cornell’s address, the Lieutenant-Governor, Stewart L. Woodford, administered the oath of office to Mr. White as President of the University, and then placed in his hands a casket of carved oak containing the charter and the seal of the university and the keys of the buildings.

Mr. White’s address, carefully prepared, was a good one, but inevitably lacked the virtue of brevity. Fortunately, following the practice of old-fashioned divines, he itemized and italicized his main points, which were comprised under five heads: Foundation Ideas, Formative Ideas, Governmental Ideas, Permeating and Crowning Ideas, and Eliminated Ideas. Under these heads he set forth, with a wealth of illustrative comment, the aims of the university—the union of practical and liberal education, special emphasis on science, the close relation between the university and the school system of the state, the promotion of advanced graduate studies, the establishment of a variety of courses of study, and a greater freedom for the students, in respect to conduct and choice of studies, than had been customary hitherto. The Permeating and Crowning Idea was “to develop the individual man, . . . as a being intellectual, moral, and religious; and to bring the force of the individual to bear on society.” The ideas to be eliminated were, first, the idea of the pedants—the gerund-grinders who

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“teach young men by text book to parse”; and, second, the idea of the Philistines—the men for whom “Greed is God, and Money-bags his prophet.” The exercises were closed by an address, on behalf of the faculty, by Professor W. C. Russel; and another, on behalf of the Regents, by Chancellor V. L. Pruyn. The audience must have sat there—I have counted the words—for three and a half mortal hours.³⁵

In the afternoon “an immense crowd,” still unappeased, assembled on the hill for the formal presentation of the chime of bells, then housed in a wooden tower erected somewhere near the entrance to the present library.³⁶ To reach this spot one could drive up past the cemetery to Mr. Cornell’s house, and from there climb the steep ascent; or one could drive from the corner of State and Aurora up the Catskill Turnpike, turning left on Eddy Road, to Cascadilla Place, and from there walk across the new wooden bridge over the gorge, climb the sharp rise where the present gymnasium is, clamber down and up the unbridged ravine just north of the present law building, and follow the path along a rail fence, enclosing a cornfield to the right, to the bell tower. From the bell tower one could see Morrill Hall, rising stark and garish on the hillside, and beyond it the half-finished walls of White Hall, and to the right of that the wooden building called the shops. Between these two buildings and Morrill Hall one could see a ravine six or eight feet deep, bridged by two dirt causeways—one leading from Morrill to White, the other from Morrill to the shops. Just beyond the shops were some rickety cow barns. Such was the outward, visible aspect of the Cornell University in October, 1868.³⁷

The bells were formally presented, on behalf of Jenny McGraw, by Francis M. Finch, but the principal address was delivered by George William Curtis. It was what in those days people loved to hear, an oration—what was called a “notable effort,” the requirement in all such displays being that the phrasing should be studied and rehearsed, and that the sentiments

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should be edifying. Mr. Curtis met these requirements admirably, especially in his peroration, which was notable for nothing so much as for the brilliance of its imagery, unless it might be the irrelevance of its ideas. "Here is our university, our Cornell, like the man-of-war, all its sails set, its rigging full and complete from stem to stern, its crew embarked, its passengers all ready and aboard; and even as I speak to you, even as the autumn sun sets in the west, it begins to glide over the waves as it goes forth rejoicing, every stitch of canvas spread, all its colors flying, its musical bells ringing, its heartstrings beating with hope and joy." ³⁸

Mr. White, listening to this notable effort, looking out over the ragged cornfield and the rough pasture land and noting the unfinished buildings and the piled-up rubbish, experienced a momentary and unaccustomed sense of depression. No words, he felt, could fail more completely to express the reality.³⁹ The reality had been expressed by Mr. Cornell, in his address in the morning, with blunt brevity. A friend of his, he said, had recently come to Ithaca, had looked over the university, and had reported: "I did not find a single thing finished." But, said Mr. Cornell, "such is not the entertainment we invited you to. We did not expect to have a single thing finished. . . . It is the commencement that we have now in hand."

Not a single thing finished! It was indeed true, if we have in mind only the outward, material properties of the university. The "lofty clock-tower, looking proudly down," the "quadrangles as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John," any building as satisfactory as Goldwin Smith Hall, even one as formidably impressive and curiously pinnacled as Sage College—all of these, so long dreamed of by Mr. White, were indeed unfinished, were as yet not even begun. Nevertheless, on that seventh of October, 1868, something was finished. The idea of Cornell University was finished, and Mr. Cornell had himself, in his address in the morning, expressed it with admirable precision.

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I hope we have laid the foundation of an institution which shall combine practical with liberal education, which shall fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufactories, for the investigations of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor.

This was what was finished on October 7, 1868—this idea of Cornell University.¹ Seventy-five years later there is nothing we could wish to add to it, or anything we could wish to take away. And it is after all the idea that was then, as it is now, the important thing, since it was and is the source of all the rest. In response to this idea the first crude buildings were erected, the first books and apparatus were collected, and the first faculty was assembled. In response to this idea the first students came to be enrolled.² And [on this seventy-fifth anniversary] we shall do well to remember that it is not the buildings however splendid, or the quadrangles however beautiful, but this idea conceived and brought to birth by Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White—the idea of an institution freed from obligation to religious or political or social prejudice, and devoted to the advancement of knowledge in all fruitful fields of inquiry—it was this idea that then gave and still gives to Cornell University whatever high significance and enduring value it may have for learning and for the life of man.

ADDRESS

The Cornell Tradition: Freedom and Responsibility

By CARL L. BECKER

[The seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the charter of Cornell University was recognized on April 27, 1940, by the holding of a public meeting of the university and the delivery of the following address by Professor Becker.]

SEVENTY-FIVE years ago today Reuben E. Fenton, the Governor of the State of New York, signed a charter for Cornell University. The founding of the university was made possible, in great part, by the generosity of Ezra Cornell, a citizen of Ithaca. The first faculty was assembled, the university was organized, and instruction was begun under the far-sighted leadership of the first president, Andrew D. White; and in a relatively short time, as such things go, the new institution, as a result of the distinguished achievements of its faculty and the high quality of instruction offered to its students, acquired a reputation which placed it among the leading universities of the country.

In the process of acquiring a reputation Cornell acquired something better than a reputation, or rather it acquired something which is the better part of its reputation. It acquired a character. Corporations are not necessarily soulless; and of all corporations universities are the most likely to have, if not souls, at least personalities. Perhaps the reason is that universities are, after all, largely shaped by presidents and professors, and presidents and professors, especially if they are good ones, are fairly certain to be men of distinctive, not to say eccentric, minds and temperaments. A professor, as the German saying has it, is a man who thinks otherwise. Now an able and otherwise-thinking president, surrounded by able and otherwise-thinking professors, each resolutely thinking otherwise in his own manner, each astounded to find that the others, excellent fellows as he knows them in the main to be, so often refuse in matters of the highest import to be informed by knowledge or

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guided by reason—this is indeed always an arresting spectacle and may sometimes seem to be a futile performance. Yet it is not futile unless great universities are futile. For the essential quality of a great university derives from the corporate activities of such a community of other-wise-thinking men. By virtue of a divergence as well as of a community of interests, by the sharp impress of their minds and temperaments and eccentricities upon each other and upon their pupils, there is created a continuing tradition of ideas and attitudes and habitual responses that has a life of its own. It is this continuing tradition that gives to a university its corporate character or personality, that intangible but living and dynamic influence which is the richest and most durable gift any university can confer upon those who come to it for instruction and guidance.

Cornell has a character, a corporate personality, in this sense, an intellectual tradition by which it can be identified. The word which best symbolizes this tradition is freedom. There is freedom in all universities, of course—a great deal in some, much less in others; but it is less the amount than the distinctive quality and flavor of the freedom that flourishes at Cornell that is worth noting. The quality and flavor of this freedom is easier to appreciate than to define. Academic is not the word that properly denotes it. It includes academic freedom, of course, but it is something more, and at the same time something less, than that—something less formal, something less self-regarding, something more worldly, something, I will venture to say, a bit more impudent. It is, in short, too little schoolmasterish to be defined by a formula or identified with a professional code. And I think the reason is that Cornell was not founded by schoolmasters or designed strictly according to existing educational models. The founders, being both in their different ways rebels against convention, wished to establish not merely another university but a somewhat novel kind of university. Mr. Cornell desired to found an institution in which any person could study any subject. Mr. White wished to found a center of learning where mature scholars and men of the world, emancipated from the clerical tradition and inspired by the scientific idea, could pursue their studies uninhibited by the cluttered routine or the petty preoccupations of the conventional cloistered academic life. In Mr. White's view the character and quality of the university would depend upon the men selected for its faculty: devoted to the general aim of learning and teaching, they could be depended upon to devise their own ways and means of achieving that aim. The emphasis was, therefore, always on men rather than on methods; and during Mr.

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White's administration and that of his immediate successors there was assembled at Cornell, from the academic and the non-academic world, a group of extraordinary men—erudite or not as the case might be, but at all events as highly individualized, as colorful, as disconcertingly original and amiably eccentric a group of men as was ever got together for the launching of a new educational venture. It is in the main to the first president and this early group of otherwise-thinking men that Cornell is indebted for its tradition of freedom.

Many of those distinguished scholars and colorful personalities were before my time. Many of those whom I was privileged to know are now gone. A few only are still with us—worthy bearers of the tradition, indefatigable in the pursuit of knowledge, in the service of Cornell, in the promotion of the public good, young men still, barely eighty or a little more. Present or absent, the influence of this original group persists, and is attested by stories of their sayings and exploits that still circulate, a body of ancient but still living folklore. It is a pity that some one has not collected and set down these stories; properly arranged they would constitute a significant mythology, a Cornell epic which, whether literally true or only characteristic, would convey far better than official records in deans' offices the real significance of this institution. Some of these stories I have heard, and for their illustrative value will venture to recall a few of them. Like Herodotus, I give them as they were related to me without vouching for their truth, and like Herodotus, I hope no god or hero will take offense at what I say.

There is the story of the famous professor of history, passionate defender of majority rule, who, foreseeing that he would be outvoted in the faculty on the question of the location of Risley Hall, declared with emotion that he felt so strongly on the subject that he thought he ought to have two votes. The story of another professor of history who, in reply to a colleague who moved as the sense of the faculty that during war time professors should exercise great discretion in discussing public questions, declared that for his part he could not understand how any one could have the Prussian arrogance to suppose that every one could be made to think alike, or the Pomeranian stupidity to suppose that it would be a good thing if they could. The story of the eccentric and lovable professor of English who suggested that it would be a good thing, during the winter months when the wind sweeps across the hill, if the university would tether a shorn lamb on the slope south of the library building; who gave all of his students a grade of eighty-five, on the theory that they deserved at least that for patiently listening to him

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while he amused himself reading his favorite authors aloud, and for so amiably submitting to the ironical and sarcastic comments—too highly wrought and sophistically phrased in latinized English to be easily understood by them—with which he berated their indifference to good literature. There is the story of the professor who reluctantly agreed to serve as dean of a school on condition that he be relieved of the irksome task at a certain date; who, as the date approached with no successor appointed, repeatedly reminded the president that he would retire on the date fixed; and who, on that date, although no successor had meantime been appointed, cleared out his desk and departed; so that, on the day following, students and heads of departments found the door locked and no dean to affix the necessary signature to the necessary papers. A school without a dean—strange interlude indeed, rarely occurring in more decorous institutions, I should think; but one of those things that could happen in Cornell. And there is the story of the professor of entomology, abruptly leaving a faculty meeting. It seems that the discussion of a serious matter was being sidetracked by the rambling, irrelevant, and would-be facetious remarks of a dean who was somewhat of a wag, when the professor of entomology, not being a wag and being quite fed up, suddenly reached for his hat and as he moved to the door delivered himself thus: "Mr. President, I beg to be excused; I refuse to waste my valuable time any longer listening to this damned nonsense." And even more characteristic of the Cornell tradition is a story told of the first president, Andrew D. White. It is related that the lecture committee had brought to Cornell an eminent authority to give, in a certain lecture series, an impartial presentation of the Free-Silver question. Afterwards Mr. White, who had strong convictions on the subject, approached the chairman of the committee and asked permission to give a lecture in that series in reply to the eminent authority. But the chairman refused, saying in substance: "Mr. President, the committee obtained the best man it could find to discuss this question. It is of the opinion that the discussion was a fair and impartial presentation of the arguments on both sides. The committee would welcome an address by you on any other subject, or on this subject on some other occasion, but not on this subject in this series in reply to the lecture just given." It is related that Mr. White did not give a lecture on that subject in that series; it is also related that Mr. White became a better friend and more ardent admirer of the chairman of the committee than he had been. It seems that Mr. White really liked to have on his faculty men of that degree of independence and resolution.

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These stories are in the nature of little flash lights illuminating the Cornell temper. A little wild, at times, the Cornell temper; riding, not infrequently, as one may say, high, wide, and handsome. Some quality in it that is native to these states, some pungent tang of the soil, some acrid smell of the frontier and the open spaces—something of the genuine American be-damned-to-you attitude. But I should like to exhibit the Cornell tradition in relation to a more general and at the same time a more concrete situation; and I will venture to do this, even risking a lapse from good taste, by relating briefly my own experience in coming to Cornell and in adjusting myself to its peculiar climate of opinion.

My first contact with the Cornell tradition occurred in December 1916, at the meeting of the American Historical Association at Cincinnati, where Professor Charles Hull invited me to come to his room in the hotel to meet his colleagues of the history group. Intimations had reached me that I was, as the saying is, being considered at Cornell for a position in European history, so that I was rather expecting to be offered a job, at a certain salary, on condition that I should teach a certain number of courses, assume certain administrative duties, and the like. I took it for granted that Cornell would handle these matters in the same businesslike way that other universities did. But I found that Professor Hull had a manner and a method all his own. He did not offer me a job—nothing as crude as that; he invited me, on behalf of his colleagues, to join the faculty of Cornell University. The difference may be subtle, but I found it appreciable. On the chance that I might have formed a too favorable opinion of Cornell, Professor Hull hastened to set me right by itemizing, in great detail, the disadvantages which, from a disinterested point of view, there might be in being associated with the institution, as well as, more doubtfully, certain possible advantages. Among the disadvantages, according to Professor Hull, was the salary; but he mentioned, somewhat apologetically, a certain sum which I could surely count on, and intimated that more might be forthcoming if my decision really depended upon it. By and large, from Professor Hull's elaborate accounting, I gathered that Cornell, as an educational institution, was well over in the red, but that, such as it was, with all its sins of omission heavy upon it, it would be highly honored if I could so far condescend to its needs as to associate myself with it.

There apparently, so far as Professor Hull was concerned, the matter rested. Nothing was said of courses to be taught, minimum hours of instruction, or the like mundane matters. In the end I had to inquire what the home work would be—how many hours and what courses

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I would be required to teach. Professor Hull seemed mildly surprised at the question. "Why," he said, "I don't know that anything is *required* exactly. It has been customary for the Professor of Modern History to give to the undergraduates a general survey course in modern history, and sometimes if he deems it advisable, a more advanced course in some part of it in which he is especially interested, and in addition to supervise, to whatever extent may seem to him desirable, the work of such graduate students as may come to him. We had rather hoped that you would be disposed to do something of this sort, but I don't know that I can say that anything specific in the way of courses is really *required*. We have assumed that whatever you found convenient and profitable to do would be sufficiently advantageous to the university and satisfactory to the students." Well, there it was. Such a magnification of the professor, such a depreciation of the university, had never before, in similar circumstances, come my way. After a decent interval I condescended to join the faculty of Cornell University. And why not? To receive a good salary for doing as I pleased—what could be better? The very chance I had been looking for all my life.

And so in the summer of 1917 I came to Cornell, prepared to do as I pleased, wondering what the catch was, supposing that Professor Hull's amiable attitude must be either an eccentric form of ironic understatement or else a super-subtle species of bargaining technique. Anyway I proposed to try it out. I began to do as I pleased, expecting some one would stop me. No one did. I went on and on and still no one paid any attention. Personally I was cordially received, but officially no one made any plans to entertain me, to give me the right steer, to tell me what I would perhaps find it wise to do or to refrain from doing. Professor Hull's attitude did seem after all to represent, in some idealized fashion, the attitude of Cornell University. There was about the place a refreshing sense of liberation from the prescribed and the insistent, an atmosphere of casual urbanity, a sense of leisurely activity going on, with time enough to admire the view, and another day coming. No one seemed to be in a hurry, except Mr. Burr of course, and sometimes perhaps Mr. Ranum. But that was their affair—a response, no doubt, to the compulsion of some inner daemon. At least I saw no indication that deans or heads of departments were exerting pressure or pushing any one around. Certainly no head of the history department was incommoding me, for the simple reason, if for no other, that there didn't seem to be any history department, much less a head. There were seven professors of history, and when we met we called ourselves the "History

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Group," but no one of us had any more authority than any other. On these occasions Professor Hull presided, for no reason I could discover except that we met in his office because it was the largest and most convenient. Whatever the History Group was it was not a department. If there was any department of history, then there were six; in which case I was the sole member, and presumably the head, of the department of Modern European History. The only evidence of this was that twice a year I received a communication from the president: one requesting me to prepare the budget, which consisted chiefly in setting down the amount of my own salary, an item which the president presumably already knew more about than I did; the other a request for a list of the courses given and the number of students, male and female, enrolled during the year. I always supposed, therefore, that there were six departments of history, each manned by one professor, except the department of American history, which ran to the extraordinary number of two. I always supposed so, that is, until one day Professor Hull said he wasn't sure there were, officially speaking, any departments of history at all; the only thing he was sure of was that there were seven professors of history. The inner truth of the matter I never discovered. But the seven professors were certainly members of the Faculty of Arts, the Graduate Faculty, and the University Faculty since they were often present at the meetings of these faculties. They were also, I think, members of the Faculty of Political Science, a body that seemed to have no corporeal existence since it never met, but that nevertheless seemed to be something—a rumor perhaps, a disembodied tradition or vestigial remainder never seen, but lurking about somewhere in the more obscure recesses of Goldwin Smith Hall. I never had the courage to ask Professor Hull about the university—about its corporate administrative existence, I mean—for fear he might say that he wasn't sure it had any: it was on the cards that the university might turn out to be nothing more than forty or fifty professors.

At all events, the administration (I assumed on general principles that there was one somewhere) wasn't much in evidence and exerted little pressure. There was a president (distinguished scholar and eminent public figure) who presided at faculty meetings and the meeting of the Board of Trustees, and always delivered the Commencement address. But the president, so far as I could judge, was an umpire rather than a captain, and a Gallup poll would have disclosed the fact that some members of the community regarded him as an agreeable but purely decorative feature, his chief function being, as one of my col-

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leagues said, "to obviate the difficulties created by his office." I never shared this view. I have a notion that the president obviated many difficulties, especially for the faculty, that were in no sense created by his office. There were also deans, but not many or much looked up to for any authority they had or were disposed to exercise. Even so, the general opinion seemed to be that the appointment of professors to the office was a useless waste of talent. "Why is it," asked Professor Nichols, "that as soon as a man has demonstrated that he has an unusual knowledge of books, some one immediately insists on making him a bookkeeper?" In those days the dean of the College, at all events, was scarcely more than a bookkeeper—a secretary elected by the faculty to keep its records and administer the rules enacted by it.

The rules were not many or much displayed or very oppressive—the less so since in so many cases they were conflicting, so that one could choose the one which seemed most suitable. The rules seemed often in the nature of miscellaneous conveniences lying about for a professor to use if he needed something of the sort. An efficient administrator, if there had been one, would no doubt have found much that was ill-defined and haphazard in the rules. Even to a haphazard professor, like myself, it often seemed so, for if I inquired what the authority for this or that rule was, the answer would perhaps be that it wasn't a rule but only a custom; and upon further investigation the custom, as like as not, would turn out to be two other customs, varying according to the time and the professor. Even in the broad distribution of powers the efficient administrator might have found much to discontent his orderly soul. I was told that according to the Cornell statutes the university is subject to the control of the Board of Trustees, but that according to the laws of the state it is subject to the Board of Regents. It may or may not be so. I never pressed the matter. I was advised not to, on the theory that at Cornell it always creates trouble when any one looks up the statutes. The general attitude, round and round about, seemed to be that the university would go on very well indeed so long as no one paid too much attention to the formal authority with which any one was invested. And, in fact, in no other university that I am acquainted with does formal authority count for so little in deciding what shall or shall not be done.

In this easy-going, loose-jointed institution the chances seemed very good indeed for me to do as I pleased. Still there was an obvious limit. The blest principle of doing as one pleased presumably did not reach to the point of permitting me to do nothing. Presumably, the general

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expectation would be that I would at least be pleased to do something, and the condition of doing something was that I alone had to decide what that something should be. This was for me something of a novelty. Hitherto many of the main points—the courses to be given, the minimum hours of instruction, the administrative duties to be assumed—had mostly been decided for me. I had only to do as I was told. This might be sometimes annoying, but it was never difficult. Mine not to question why, mine not to ask whether what I was doing was worth while or the right thing to do. It was bound to be the right thing to do since some one else, some one in authority, so decided. But now, owing to the great freedom at Cornell, I was in authority and had to decide what was right and worth while for me to do. This was not so easy, and I sometimes tried to shift the responsibility to Professor Burr, by asking him whether what I proposed to do was the right thing to do. But Professor Burr wasn't having any. He would spin me a long history, the upshot of which was that what I proposed to do had sometimes been done and sometimes not, so that whatever I did I was sure to have plenty of precedents on my side. And if I tried to shift the responsibility to Professor Hull I had no better luck. He too would spin me a history, not longer than that of Professor Burr, but only taking longer to relate, and the conclusion which he reached was always the same: the conclusion always was, "and so, my dear boy, you can do as you please."

In these devious ways I discovered that I could do as I pleased all right. But in the process of discovering this I also discovered something else. I discovered what the catch was. The catch was that, since I was free to do as I pleased, I was responsible for what it was that I pleased to do. The catch was that, with all my great freedom, I was in some mysterious way still very much bound. Not bound by orders imposed upon me from above or outside, but bound by some inner sense of responsibility, by some elemental sense of decency or fair play or mere selfish impulse to justify myself; bound to all that comprised Cornell University, to the faculty that had so politely invited me to join it without imposing any obligations, to the amiable deans who never raised their voices or employed the imperative mood, to the distinguished president and the Board of Trustees in the offing who every year guaranteed my salary without knowing precisely what, if anything, I might be doing to earn it—to all these I was bound to justify myself by doing, upon request and in every contingency, the best I was capable of doing. And thus I found myself working, although without interference and under no outside compulsion, with more concentration, with greater satisfaction, and,

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I dare say, with better effect, than I could otherwise have done. I relate my own experience, well aware that it cannot be in all respects typical, since it is characteristic of Cornell to permit a wide diversity in departmental organization and procedure. Yet this very diversity derives from the Cornell tradition which allows a maximum of freedom and relies so confidently upon the sense of personal responsibility for making a good use of it.

I should like to preserve intact the loose-jointed administrative system and the casual freedoms of the old days. But I am aware that it is difficult to do so in the present-day world in which the complex and impersonal forces of a technological society tend to diminish the importance of the individual and to standardize his conduct and thinking, a society in which life often seems impoverished by the overhead charges required to maintain it. Universities cannot remain wholly unaffected by this dominant trend in society. As they become larger and more complicated a more reticulated organization is called for, rules multiply and become more uniform, and the members of the instructing staff, turned out as a standardized article in mass production by our graduate schools, are more subdued to a common model. Somewhat less than formerly, it seems, is the professor a man who thinks otherwise. More than formerly the professor and the promoter are in costume and deportment if not of imagination all compact; and every year it becomes more difficult, in the market place or on the campus, to distinguish the one from the other at ninety yards by the naked eye. On the whole we all deplore this trend towards standardization, but in the particular instance the reasons for it are often too compelling to be denied. Nevertheless, let us yield to this trend only as a necessity and not as something good in itself. Let us hold, in so far as may be, to the old ways, to the tradition in which Cornell was founded and by which it has lived.

But after all, one may ask, and it is a pertinent question, why is so much freedom desirable? Do we not pay too high a price for it in loss of what is called efficiency? Why should any university pay its professors a good salary, and then guarantee them so much freedom to follow their own devices? Surely not because professors deserve, more than other men, to have their way of life made easy. Not for any such trivial reason. Universities are social institutions, and should perform a social service. There is indeed no reason for the existence of Cornell, or of any university, or for maintaining the freedom of learning and teaching which they insist upon, except in so far as they serve to maintain and promote the humane and rational values which are essential to the

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preservation of democratic society, and of civilization as we understand it. Democratic society, like any other society, rests upon certain assumptions as to what is supremely worth while. It assumes the worth and dignity and creative capacity of the human personality as an end in itself. It assumes that it is better to be governed by persuasion than by compulsion, and that good will and humane dealing are better than a selfish and a contentious spirit. It assumes that man is a rational creature, and that to know what is true is a primary value upon which in the long run all other values depend. It assumes that knowledge and the power it confers should be employed for promoting the welfare of the many rather than for safeguarding the interests of the few.

These are the rational and the humane values which are inseparable from democracy if democracy is to be of any worth. Yet they are older than democracy and are not dependent upon it. They have a life of their own apart from any form of government or type of civilization. They are the values which, since the time of Buddha and Confucius, Solomon and Zoroaster, Socrates and Plato and Jesus, men have commonly recognized as good even when they have denied them in practice, the values which men have commonly celebrated in the saints and martyrs they have agreed to canonize. They are the values which readily lend themselves to rational justification, but need no justification. No man ever yet found it necessary to justify a humane act by saying that it was really a form of oppression, or a true statement by swearing that it was a sacred lie. But every departure from the rational and the humane, every resort to force and deception, whether in civil government, in war, in the systematic oppression of the many or the liquidation of the few, calls for justification, at best by saying that the lesser evil is necessary for the greater good, at worst by resorting to that hypocrisy which, it has been well said, is the tribute that vice customarily pays to virtue.

In the long history of civilization the rational and humane values have sometimes been denied in theory, and persistently and widely betrayed in fact; but not for many centuries has the denial in theory or the betrayal in fact been more general, more ominous, or more disheartening than in our own day. Half the world is now controlled by self-inspired autocratic leaders who frankly accept the principle that might makes right, that justice is the interest of the stronger; leaders who regard the individual as of no importance except as an instrument to be used, with whatever degree of brutality may be necessary, for the realization of their shifting and irresponsible purposes; leaders who subor-

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dinate reason to will, identify law and morality with naked force as an instrument of will, and accord value to the disinterested search for truth only in so far as it may be temporarily useful in attaining immediate political ends. If these are indeed the values we cherish, then we too should abandon democracy, we too should close our universities or degrade them, as in many countries whose most distinguished scholars now live in exile they have been degraded, to the level of servile instruments in the support of state policy. But if we still cherish the democratic way of life, and the rational and humane values which are inseparable from it, then it is of supreme importance that we should preserve the tradition of freedom of learning and teaching without which our universities must cease to be institutions devoted to the disinterested search for truth and the increase of knowledge as ends in themselves desirable.

These considerations make it seem to me appropriate, on this memorial occasion, to recall the salient qualities which have given Cornell University its peculiar character and its high distinction; and, in conclusion, to express the hope that Cornell in the future, whatever its gains, whatever its losses, may hold fast to its ancient tradition of freedom and responsibility—freedom for the scholar to perform his proper function, restrained and guided by the only thing that makes such freedom worth while, the scholar's intellectual integrity, the scholar's devotion to the truth of things as they are and to good will and humane dealing among men.

