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# In re Princeton University.

## Correspondence in New York Evening Post between an "Alumnus" and a "Trustee."

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### THE STRUGGLE AT PRINCETON.

To the Editor of The Evening Post:

Sir: If Princeton stands "for the nation's service," as stated by President Wilson in his inaugural address, it is surely "charged with a public use." The widespread interest in its difficulties, as well as its development, is, therefore, justified and natural. Princeton cannot, if it would, live unto itself. It cannot, if it would, avoid publicity. Our educational institutions are under the same inexorable scrutiny as Trusts and combinations in the industrial world. It is useless, therefore, to cry out against publicity, no matter how painful it may be. To put one's house in order and to keep it so, and, if it be an educational institution, to make it responsive to the need and spirit of the age, to make it effective in the nation's service, is the only way to escape the pains and penalties which it is the duty of the press to inflict upon those who sin against the nation's welfare.

Princeton has suffered from violent convulsions twice within a period of four years. We are not now concerned with the nature of these paroxysms; they are merely symptoms or manifestations of some constitutional difficulty. If the cause of this difficulty is not disclosed, and if possible, removed, these convulsions will periodically recur, and with increasing violence, until the situation is so changed as to conform to that principle of life and activity, which is ultimately to prevail.

To the casual observer neither the "quad" scheme nor Dean West's plan for a graduate college, no matter how fatal or favorable to present conditions, can explain the irreconcilable and irrepressible conflict which now divides the board of trustees into two hostile sections. We must look deeper than these two incidents for the real cause.

During the previous administration the most pressing demand that was made upon the board was to be let alone, not that something should be done, but that nothing should be done—nothing to disturb the academic peace and somnolence of the place. During this long and somewhat trying period of academic decay two or three members of the board were faithful, and seemingly would have remained faithful until death—Princeton's or their own. They were

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faithful in carrying Princeton's burdens, strong in their hope that some day she would break from her slumber and swoon and take her place as a living force in the nation's life.

It is here we must look to find the origin of the real cause of the present difficulty. This difficulty has been a growth. In the early years of its development it certainly was benign, and by many was regarded as a blessing, as it gave evidence that life was not wholly extinct in the board of trustees or among the alumni. Even in decay Princeton was grateful, and this gratitude ripened into loyalty—loyalty to those who had carried Princeton through a period of inactivity and depression which threatened to end in her virtual extinction as an important seat of learning. This influence was not a board influence; it was individual character.

To those of us who have had a reasonably wide experience of life it must be clear that here is a situation which could not fail to develop constitutional dangers of the first order. They are the personal and almost inevitable dangers and difficulties old housekeepers create when faced with such change.

A new administration came in, and the personnel of the board became greatly changed. While appreciative and grateful, many of the new members could not act as trustees and be blind to everything but loyalty to one or two individuals. It is natural that many still act on that principle, and do not critically examine into present conditions, and cannot or will not entertain any suggestion looking toward development or change which is not approved by the influence which they still loyally, if somewhat blindly, follow and support.

As I said, this situation has been a growth. It has now, however, assumed a form which must be recognized as incompatible with academic freedom on the one hand and the responsible discharge of a trust on the other. If it interferes with either, it must be removed or it will automatically eliminate those in the faculty who need not and will not carry on their work under any other conditions than those of perfect freedom, as it must also eliminate from the board those who will not subordinate their sense of duty in the discharge of a trust to any consideration that is purely personal in character. This statement is so elementary that it needs no elaboration or discussion to establish its truth.

It only remains to inquire whether this applies to Princeton, and whether it explains the crisis which confronts the institution at the present time. The convulsions referred to do not constitute the crisis, they only indicate the approach of a crisis.

It is a matter of common knowledge at Princeton that when the "quad" plan became a burning issue the faculty were forbidden to continue consideration of it, and they do not now feel at liberty to discuss it; although it is admitted by all concerned that some remedy for the social conditions existing is the most pressing need of the university undergraduate life. This prohibition was not imposed by any action taken by the board of trustees.

An examination of the documents made public relative to the proposed gift from Mr. Procter reveals the same individual action as distinguished from official board action.

No one who is familiar with Princeton and its internal affairs can fail to conclude that it has developed into a proprietary institution. If it is found that a majority of the board favor this proprietary basis and act upon it, they must act upon the principle of following a leader. This

would necessarily result in drastic though voluntary, eliminations from the board, and as necessarily would result in the elimination of President Wilson and the leading members of the faculty. It is difficult to imagine the kind of man who could be induced to take the presidency of Princeton made vacant by such a development.

That an attempt is being made to secure a majority of the board who shall be "follow my leader" men, is made clear by the disregard by the New York alumni of the established geographical distribution of the five alumni trustees. The original distribution was as follows: One each from New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Chicago, and St. Louis. This year the term of the member for the Southwest expires. It would doubtless be possible to find in the Southwest a safe "follow my leader" man, but it is safer to be certain, and so the distribution which has been in force for ten years is brushed aside and New York nominates her safest man in opposition to the representative from the Southwest. I desire only to state the situation in its entirety, and then leave it to the judgment of a larger clientage than the Princeton alumni either East or West.

What President Wilson has done to raise Princeton to its present position is known to the entire university world. The development in scientific equipment represented by the two great laboratories is generally understood to have been made possible by men who believe in President Wilson. They certainly were donated since the "quad" question became a living issue. Is Princeton's fate to be confirmed as a proprietary institution maintained as an adjunct to the social clubs on Prospect Avenue, or will she emerge from this constitutional struggle strong "for the nation's service?" This is the issue that is now being fought out, and the entire country will watch the struggle with deep interest, if not with anxiety.

AN ALUMNUS.

New York, March 4.

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To the Editor of The Evening Post:

Sir: If your correspondent who, in a letter published in the *Evening Post* of March 8 signs himself "An Alumnus," and who, over that signature, attacks those trustees of Princeton University who do not agree with President Wilson in the present discussion, will say who he is, I will defend my conduct as a trustee over my own name. But if he shall choose to remain hidden, I will remain silent. For I am sure that the irresponsible attack of an anonymous writer who, after being challenged to declare himself, chooses still to shelter himself behind the wall of anonymity, can hurt no cause except the cause he is attempting to defend.

A TRUSTEE.

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#### IDENTITY OF "AN ALUMNUS."

To the Editor of The Evening Post:

Sir: For the purpose of enabling your correspondent signing himself "A Trustee" in your

issue of March 10, to defend himself, you are authorized to state that the communication signed "An Alumnus," in your issue of March 8, was written by me.

DAVID B. JONES.

Augusta, Ga., March 12.

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To the Editor of The Evening Post:

I am glad that "An Alumnus" has declared himself to be Mr. David B. Jones. I am particularly glad to find in the writer a gentleman who distinguished himself as a university student, who has been my colleague in the Board of Trustees, and who, by large gifts to its endowment, is one of the University's benefactors. When I read his letter in the Post, I recognized his ability and the deep interest in the highest elements of the University's life it revealed. I would be permitted to add that I think Mr. Jones would have both written a better statement of his views and shown a less critical spirit toward others had he made himself more aware of his responsibility as a public writer by determining to place his name at the bottom of his letter. Had he done so, he would scarcely have called the period of Dr. Patton's administration "a period of decay" or spoken of Princeton as "a proprietary institution" with a number of trustees disposed to "follow a leader." by which term Mr. Jones means, of course, to describe Mr. M. Taylor Pyne. Before defending my own conduct as a trustee, I think, since I am to reply to Mr. Jones's letter, I ought to say something about each of these gentlemen.

Certainly, a statement in the Annual Catalogue of the University for the current year does not give the reader the impression that the period of Dr. Patton's Presidency was a "period of decay." "During his administration of fourteen years," says the Catalogue, "the student enrollment increased from 603 in 1888 to 1354 in 1902. The Faculty numbered forty in 1888; in 1902, 100. Seventeen new buildings were erected during President Patton's incumbency." If one will turn from the annual to the general catalogue, he may read the list of professors who in this "period of decay" were added to the teaching staff of the university. It is a notable list. It comprises a large proportion of the men of scholarship, of science and of culture who constitute the elder Faculty of to-day. To mention no others, it contains the name of Woodrow Wilson, who not only was acquired in Dr. Patton's administration, but who seems during the period to have enjoyed two advances in position. It was the period of lecture courses and of free electives after the Sophomore year. In what may be called the courses of culture, as distinguished from the courses of science and those of discipline, the Professors delivered lectures to classes some of which embraced a hundred or perhaps two hundred students. Of these, no lectures were more popular than those of Professor Wilson, I am sure that they finely quickened, guided and informed the mind of many a student. A great deal can be said in favor of the system. But certain evils attended lectures and free electives for undergraduates. The system increased the percentage of absences; it promoted "cramming" just before examination, and led a number of the less serious students to choose their courses on one of two

principles; the principle of "cinch," the selection of the easiest studies, or the principle of "bunch," the selection of midweek studies with a view to a free week-end. This is the only thing in the period of Dr. Patton's administration I know of that furnishes the slightest excuse for the expression, "a period of decay." Princeton was decaying no more than the other great universities; all of which were suffering at the same time in the same way. And it was precisely in this period that the pedagogic reform began. Animated faculty debates on reform in which, no doubt, Professor Wilson took an active part, as certainly Dr. Patton did, clarified the minds of professors in respect to the subject and prepared the way for the reforms of the present administration. Far from being a period of decay, Dr. Patton's administration was one of healthy and abounding life. Dr. Patton, like every one else, has the defects of his qualities. But he not only has large intelligence and fine faculties and brilliant gifts of expression, he has also sympathy and appreciation and that type of generosity which issues from magnanimity. These are great traits; and they united with favoring circumstances to make an administration which honored him and advanced the University.

Of, Mr. Pyne, I should have said, that the very last charge anyone would think of bringing against him is that of contemplating the University with any other feeling than the affection which every graduate feels for his college. There is a sense in which every one appropriates to himself the object of his affection. And, no doubt, in this sense it is especially true of Mr. Pyne that he looks on the university as his personal property. For his affection for Princeton is, as all who know him know, peculiarly intense. It was natural that he should wish to rear his family in a village in which seven or eight generations of their ancestors had lived; and, living here, it has been proper as it has been natural for him to show his affection for Princeton by abundant good works. Scrupulously attentive to duty, by eminence a man of good will, a man of marked ability, of high tastes and fine culture, how could it be otherwise, or, how other than desirable, that in University affairs he should exert a great influence? But to exert influence is one thing and to exercise authority is another. That he has ever tried to exercise authority either directly or by indirection, no one who knows him, and certainly not Mr. Jones, believes. My knowledge of him justifies my conviction that, in exerting his necessarily large influence, he has never transgressed the limits fixed by the finest sense of honor and propriety. As for the following Mr. Pyne as one "follows a leader"—if, by this phrase Mr. Jones means that I, for example, listen to Mr. Pyne on subjects on which he has bestowed great study or labor, with the presumption that he knows what he is talking about and has the welfare of the University at heart, and it will be safe for me to adopt his views, I can only say that Mr. Pyne has fully earned the right to such a presumption. If Mr. Jones means more than this he is doing Mr. Pyne a grave injustice. Happy the University that has among its children men of intellectual and material gifts, who, like Mr. Pyne and Mr. Jones, are ready to place both at the disposal of their mother.

Coming now to "the defence" of my disagreement with Dr. Wilson in respect to Mr. Procter's gift, let me begin by saying, that while the disagreement is clear, it is confined to a single subject. I have no criticism of the quadrangle system to offer. On the contrary, when in June 1907, Dr. Wilson's report commending the system was presented to the Board, I voted heartily for the resolution commissioning him to mature the plan and to confer with the Clubs. I was opposed indeed to the printing of the report; for the reason that I thought its publication would prevent any diplomatic conference with those institutions; being sure that the officers of the clubs would look on the report as the trustees' ultimatum and prepare to fight. They did so. When in October of the same year, the Board voted to withdraw from Dr. Wilson this commission, I gave the solitary vote against the withdrawal; believing that we ought not to reverse our almost unanimous action of the preceding June. Mr. Jones I know, would have been glad to vote as I did, had he not been prevented by members of the Committee. Nor was I in favor of accepting the first proposal made by Mr. Procter. Indeed, I voted with the minority against it; for the reasons that Mr. Procter reserved to himself the designation of the objects for which his money would be used, and that I feared that the other condition of his proposal would put in peril the endowment of the preceptorial system. Both of these objections, I am glad to say, were afterwards removed. Nor am I opposed to the preceptorial system which is so closely associated with Dr. Wilson's administration. I think that the system has proved itself a beneficent success; though I hold that some of its details should be changed. My disagreement with Dr. Wilson relates solely to Mr. Procter's second proposal which was substituted for the first, to the proposal which, only three weeks before it was made, Dr. Wilson himself not only suggested but by arguments commended to Mr. Procter. My disagreement relates in particular to the speech made by Dr. Wilson to the Trustees on the 13th of last January; a speech in which he urged the Board to reject the very offer of Mr. Procter which he himself had originated and suggested. And since, in matters of this kind one should speak with perfect frankness, I will say, that I thought then and still think that in taking the position he then took, Dr. Wilson was betrayed into a most serious error of judgment, and made an almost capitally disastrous mistake in administration. That was the unfortunate moment in which he divided his Board into what Mr. Jones inaccurately calls "two hostile sections," and in which he became responsible for the present irritation of a large and influential body of the alumni.

To realize the greatness of Dr. Wilson's mistake, one only needs to suppose that he had made a speech of another kind. Suppose that in a few graceful sentences he had praised Mr. Procter's large mindedness, had thanked him for offering this new solution of a vexing problem, had asked the Board to accept the offer, and had added that, since neither he (Dr. Wilson) was satisfied with the proposal when he suggested it, nor Mr. Procter quite liked it when he accepted it, he proposed the appointment of a Committee to confer with Mr. Procter as to the final dis-



position of his generous gift. In that case, instead of a divided, there would to-day be a united Board; instead of an irritated, there would be an enthusiastic body of alumni; instead of cancellations, there would be an increase of contributions to the alumni funds; and we should now be rejoicing in the addition to the resources of the university of nearly a million dollars. And yet no democratic or pedagogic ideal would have been shattered; no principle would have been violated; no change in the courses or professors or conditions of the graduate school would have been made; and Dr. Wilson would have been just as untrammelled as he has heretofore been in developing the University along the lines he likes. The only question, remaining to be settled, would be the relatively unimportant one; "where shall we build the boarding-house for graduates," or "shall we build two boarding-houses or only one."

I know it is asserted that the fate of great principles and cherished ideals was involved in the dealing of the trustees with this offer. I know it has been charged that one side is for "dilletantism" and "frills," and that "serious dissensions" have arisen over the questions, "How shall the boarding-house be kept?" and "How shall its inmates be treated as to clothes and bath rooms." But, surely, these are not details of sufficient importance to justify the board's dividing on. I have had the benefit of long interviews on these and kindred subjects with Dr. Wilson, Dr. Fine, Dr. Daniels, Dr. Hibben and Dr. West—every one of them a man of talents—interviews sought by me for the purpose of getting clear definitions, precise delimitations of the principles or ideals about which there is controversy, and obtaining authentic information concerning the alleged wrong conditions which need to be made right. I am to-day unable to define the principles, or describe the ideals, or portray the wrong conditions. Dr. Wilson, after vainly trying to make me understand them, urged me to see Dr. Fine; and Dr. Fine, after similar ill-success, suggested that I see Dr. Daniels; and from Dr. Daniels' house, after a two hours' delightful interview, I came away no wiser on this subject than when I entered it. Dr. Wilson has never seemed to me to be able clearly to set them forth, though by this time, certainly, he ought to be fully aware that the most important duty now devolving on him is to make these principles and ideals absolutely plain to the understanding of the trustees, the alumni, and the general public.

There has been no difficulty in organizing the graduate school, as distinguished from the graduate "college" or, as I prefer to call it, "boarding-house." So Dr. Hibben tells me. The members of the faculty committee have, since their appointment in April, 1909, reorganized the courses of the school without harsh debate. And this is the really important matter. In this work, no fixed lines of cleavage appeared in the committee. It was only when the "boarding-house" question appeared, that the fixed cleavage revealed itself and "angry passions rose."

Why then should I not be on the side I am on? Why should I not lament the loss of a million dollars for the sake of a trifle? And why should I not say that, in rejecting his own

proposal to Mr. Procter and putting away from the treasury for the present at least, and perhaps forever, a million dollars, Dr. Wilson made a disastrous mistake in administration?

I wish also to say a word about the letter of Mr. Thomas Jones, the Chairman of the Committee of five, addressed to Mr. Procter. No doubt, it is only too easy for an eminent lawyer to take the attitude of a cross-examiner. And take it Mr. Jones did. Mr. Procter had come to Princeton, bearing in his hands a great gift for the college. It was the blessed mission of the committee to assist him to deposit it in the treasury of the University. How did they go about their appointed work? Their Chairman wrote Mr. Procter a letter making inquisition as to his motives, his ideals and his conduct upon supposed conditions. I am sure Mr. Jones did not mean to do so; but he addressed Mr. Procter a communication which, interpreted by itself alone and not by what one knows of Mr. Jones, any reader would say, was designed to force a confession that, in offering to the graduate school a half million dollars, he had a sinister *arrière pensée*. After such a letter, Mr. Procter had no option but to say "You do not seem to be clear as to your own ideals and my proposal does not meet the usefulness I had hoped," and to withdraw his offer.

What then is the duty of the board in the present crisis? Obviously to approach Mr. Procter again, to suggest with dignity and courtesy a renewal of his latest offer, and should he adopt the suggestion, to accept his offer and appoint a committee to confer with him as to the final disposition of his gift. This would hurt no ideal; it would violate no principle, and it would bring peace. I have good reason for believing that Dr. Wilson himself would regard such action as wise and sensible and would contemplate its initiation with sympathy.

JOHN DE WITT.

(Dated)

Princeton, N. J., March 15, 1910.

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