

CORNELL'S B. A.

Declared to be No Counterfeit or Degradation, or Bit of Commercialism, but a Step Forward.

(Being President Schurman's reply to President Stryker in the recent debate before the teachers at Rochester.)

I have felt in the course of the debate that if the action taken by Cornell University were properly understood by the members of this association, it would in all probability receive an overwhelming if not a unanimous endorsement. But it seems almost impossible to get the educators of the state to understand what we have done.

One of the speakers here to-day said that at Cornell University we now propose to give the degree of B. A. to any man who studies four years, whether he takes agriculture, mechanical engineering or law. Now, let me say that this is a rank delusion. Cornell University consists of a Graduate Department, which gives the Degrees of Master and Doctor; of an Academic Department, or as some of you might perhaps call it, a Collegiate Department, which gives the B. A. degree; and thirdly, of a number of professional colleges, Law, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture and Veterinary Science, every one of which has its own professional degree. A man, for example, who studies four years in architecture gets the degree of Bachelor of Architecture, and the man who studies four years in mechanical engineering gets the degree of M. E. The course in each of these professional colleges is prescribed and any one can tell exactly what the degree means. In this discussion we are dealing solely with what we call the Academic Department or the Department of Arts and Sciences—that division of the University which corresponds to what has been called here the old-fashioned college. The question before us is this: Whether in the Academic Department, or the Department of Arts and Sciences, we should have one degree or more? Now Cornell has declared that there should be but one degree, and that it should be B. A.

We are told by President Stryker, and by other speakers here, that this is a counterfeit of the standard, a kind of 53-cent dollar. Gentlemen, I have some part in the recent campaign and I know something of what can be said for and against the 53-cent dollar; but I say most deliberately, and with an intensity of conviction, that any one who describes what we have done at Cornell University by these terms is, of course, unwittingly, but all the same preposterously and egregiously, misleading the public and deceiving himself. On the contrary, the change which we have made at Cornell University grows out of the fact that we have been raising the standards for some years past. Formerly, students could enter the Academic Department of Cornell University in the B. L., S. S., or Ph. B. courses with one, or two, or three years of preparatory study in the high school, and then after four years of work receive their degree. But we have now raised all the entrance requirements to the level of those for the B. A. course. Every student who enters our Academic Department must be at least a graduate of the high school, and consequently there is here no debasement of standards. There is no counterfeiting of the trade-mark; we have raised instead of lowered our standards.

Then we are told that the degree has a traditional, or, as some one has said, an historic meaning, and we at Cornell, in the arrogance and presumption of youth, have undertaken to change that meaning and attach to the degree an arbitrary connotation of our own.

THE TIMES HAVE CHANGED.
What simplicity! The times have changed. Will the gentleman who has taken his seat recall what he and I studied when we went to the old-fashioned college a generation ago? For myself, I had a four-year course in Greek and Latin and mathematics. A generation ago, or two generations ago, the degree of B. A. did mean something definite. It meant four years of Greek and Latin and mathematics, following upon a thorough preparatory course in the classical academy. But to-day there is no college which maintains such a curriculum. The oldest college in the country, Harvard, gives the degree of B. A. on four years of elective work (without either Latin or Greek) and even for entrance, Greek is not prescribed. Williams College, which has

just celebrated its centennial, requires only one ancient language for the B. A. degree; and in this state the same is true of Columbia.

I myself graduated at British universities, having my Bachelor's and Master's degree from one and my Doctor's from another. When I was a student there, Latin and Greek were prescribed. To-day in one of the great English universities, and all four of the Scottish universities, only one ancient language is prescribed. And the oldest university in the English-speaking world, that venerable institution in the city of groves and towers and minarets, that fons et origo of classical culture—Oxford University, I say, grants the degree of B. A. on requirement of which, as one of your own members has said in an article he has just now handed me which he contributed to the December, 1892, number of the Educational Review: "No one can form the slightest a priori idea of what a young man actually studied for an Oxford B. A. degree. It was, perhaps, law or theology, or Sanskrit or mathematics or morphology."

Where does your historic and traditional trade-mark exist, sir? Only in your imagination! The Zeit-Geist is stirring with new life. We recognize this movement at Cornell and have placed ourselves deliberately, and after a most careful investigation of the practice of the universities in this country and other countries, at its head and front. The stream of tendency is behind us though. And others are following in our wake. Indeed, it may be said that we have only gone one step farther than the oldest and most venerable institution—I mean Harvard. If you ask me why we have taken that step, I will answer that we have taken it deliberately in the interests, first of all, of secondary education. Over 80 per cent. of the students who enter Cornell University come from the public high schools. In those institutions the course is shaped, as I explained in the public address I had the honor of giving last night, in accordance with the needs of the community and the ideals of their educators.

"THE LIBERAL CULTURE OF THE MODERN WORLD."

President Stryker has talked as though we at Cornell are infected with the spirit of commercialism. To prepare men for the professions was indeed the original object for which universities were founded. But while we believe in professional training, we also believe, thank God, in liberal culture. And we are doing the utmost that in us lies for the promotion of liberal culture. And no appropriations by the Trustees of Cornell for any division of the University, have been within the last few years so liberal and so munificent as the appropriations we have made for Greek and Latin and history and philosophy and the humanities in general. But while we insist on liberal culture and endeavor to promote it, our aim is to minister to the liberal culture of the modern world, and that is a world in which along with our own language and literature, we have to reckon not only Greek and Latin, but with French and German and Italian, with the historical and philosophical disciplines, and with mathematics and with all the sciences. We aim to provide a liberal culture through these various avenues, by means of these different instrumentalities, and the man who says we are lowering the standards because, for example, we permit students to take Latin and one modern language, is misreporting the movement and misinterpreting our aims.

You principals know well enough that your constituents, the taxpayers, are willing to pay you to teach one ancient language, but when it comes to a second foreign language they want a modern language, and in my opinion that demand is philosophically and pedagogically sound. I believe, not in two ancient languages as a universal prescription for the high schools, but in either two ancient languages, or in one ancient language and one modern, or, in certain cases, in two modern languages. If the high schools train up their boys and girls in that way, and if those boys want a liberal culture, we throw open the doors to them at Cornell University and welcome them to the Academic Department. How do you propose to deal with them?

Throw them out? That surely is
(Continued on sixth page.)

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