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# WOODROW WILSON

The Story of His Life  
From the Cradle to  
the White House

By WILLIAM BAYARD HALE

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### CHAPTER VIII.

Democracy or Aristocracy?

**D**R. WILSON had served five years as president of Princeton university before he reached the point of irremediable conflict. So long as he confined himself to the strictly educational workings of the school he had been allowed to have his way without much opposition. But now, when his constructive mind reached over to the student's social life and undertook to organize that and bring it into proper relationship with the other elements of university life, he found that he had put his hand upon what the guardians of the aristocratic institution were really interested in and what they were not disposed to see changed.

In brief, his idea was the organization of the university in a number of "colleges" or "quadrangles"—practically dormitories—each of which should harbor a certain number of men from every class, with a few of the younger professors.

President Wilson secured the appointment of a committee consisting of seven of the trustees to investigate the merits of the "quad" proposal, and at the June (1907) meeting the committee reported on "the social co-ordination of the university," indorsing Mr. Wilson's plan. The report of this committee was accepted and its recommendation adopted with only one dissenting vote, twenty-five of the twenty-seven trustees being present, at the June meeting.

What was amiss with the "quad" proposal? This—that it cut into the aristocratic social structure which the dominating element in Princeton had erected for itself.

If, visiting Princeton, you will proceed to the top of a street known as Prospect avenue and pass down it you will see something which probably is not paralleled at any seat of learning in the world. Prospect avenue is lined with clubhouses, twelve of them with handsome buildings, beautiful lawns and tennis courts and, in the case of the more favored clubs on the south side of the street, a delightful view across the valley to the eastward. Some of the clubhouses are sumptuous, comparing very favorably with the best city clubs. Their aggregate value must be much more than \$1,000,000. The clubs house on an average thirty members each—fifteen juniors and fifteen seniors, about 350 in all, juniors and seniors alone being eligible. Three hundred other members of those classes can get into no club. From this idea has grown up this dominating feature of Princeton life, estranged from the university and yet having more to do with the real forming of its students than any other feature of the college life.

No one can reflect for a moment upon this club system without understanding its essentially vicious character.

The trouble is that the clubs necessarily constitute an aristocracy in the midst of a community which should, above all things, be absolutely democratic. It may be all very well for the 300 youths who enjoy the delights of the Ivy, the Cap and Gown, the Colonial, Tiger Inn and the rest (though such luxury is of questionable value to a boy who has yet to make his way in the world), but what of the 300 young men who have not been able to "make" one of them? They feel themselves ostracized and humiliated, and the seeds of social bitterness are sown in their souls. There is no provision for them outside of common boarding houses. Not a few leave the university.

Worse yet, rivalry for admission to the clubs is so great that it injures the work of the freshmen and sophomores. The first term of the sophomore year especially is considered to be entirely wrecked by the absorption of the students in campaigning for the club elections held that spring. So highly is membership in a swag club regarded that parents of prospective students have been known to begin visits to Princeton a year or two before their son entered college with the purpose of organizing a social campaign to land him in the club to which he aspired.

It may easily be seen how the existence of these select coteries ministers to snobbery, how they foster roading, how they introduce a worldly, material and unnatural element into what is naturally one of the finest things in the world—a democracy of boys: how they set up at the outset of a student's career a mistaken ideal, an unworthy aim, and how they divide students along unnatural lines. Over and over again Princeton sees a group of congenial fellows of the incoming freshman class gravitate toward each

other in the first few weeks of the term and then, in obedience to some sudden, mysterious influence from Prospect avenue, dissolve. The spirit of the place does not allow men to form friendly and natural associations in accordance with their tastes and dispositions.

They must always strive untiringly to become friends of those particular classmates who have the best chance of "making" the best clubs, and as "the hunch" passes "down the line" from Prospect avenue the prospects of one and another student wax and wane, and the character of the coteries in which he finds himself goes up and down. The social life of the two lower classes presents such a picture as would a layer of iron filings over which a magnet is passed, forming groups now here, now there, and keeping all in constant confusion. In the words of President Wilson, the sideshow had swallowed up the circus. Nothing could be more un-American; nothing could be more opposed to the true principles of education.

We approach now one of the most dramatic, as it is one of the most in-



Photo © by American Press Association.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

volved, chapters in the life of any American institution of learning—indeed, a chapter, if it could be rightly told, not often excelled in interest in any story of American life.

A circular setting forth in outline President Wilson's "quad" proposal was sent to the various clubs and was generally read there on the Friday night before commencement, 1907. Princeton alumni, particularly those from the eastern cities, came back in large numbers to their alma mater and usually put up at the clubhouses, where the Friday night preceding commencement is given over to a jolly dinner. The "quad" proposal, it was instantly seen, contemplated the doing away of the clubs.

It was even said that President Wilson proposed to confiscate them. The wrath of the alumni jollifying that night in Prospect avenue was instantly aroused, and the shout of battle was ever given the new idea. The grieved graduates went home to spread stories of the attack on Princeton's favorite institutions and rally the old boys to their defense.

Old Princetonians got busy and wrote distressed letters to the Alumni Weekly, expressing their grief and astonishment that a Princeton president should so far forget himself as to try to "make a gentleman chum with a nigger."

The trustees, who had voted the plan through with but a single dissenting voice, now frightened by the alumni howl, were persuaded to reconsider. On Oct. 17 the board requested President Wilson to withdraw the proposal.

The inalienable right of the American college youth to choose his own husband (and compel other youths to wear untrimmed headgear) was thus triumphantly vindicated. But the saviors of the club system were not generous in victory. They continued to hurl insults upon President Wilson. It was now discovered that he was a domineering, brutal, bigoted, inconsiderate and untruthful demagogue. The preceptorial system, which had been in operation for two years, with everybody's approval, was now also attacked.

President Wilson was even charged with having inaugurated it over the heads of the faculty. Various classes among the alumni withdrew their subscriptions for the support of preceptors. It took only a few months of this sort of thing for the board of trustees, the faculty and the alumni to find themselves divided beyond compromise. Lifelong friendships were broken. The chasm deepened, and passions so violent that it would not have been deemed possible for a collegiate to possess them were aroused.

It is a little difficult to see why the question should have provoked the astonishingly bitter fight which now broke out at Princeton. To find the real cause of it all one must go deeper than the issue presented on the surface, much deeper than the mere personality of the president. As to the latter, it is quite possible that Dr. Wilson's positive character, the certainty of his convictions and his aggressiveness in expressing them may have been distasteful to men long accustomed to other methods. It is even possible that the president was not as gentle in his manner, perhaps not always as tactful, as he might have been, as he has since become. Undoubtedly a man of exceeding charm of personality, he had his grim side—no man descended from a line of Scottish Presbyter-

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ans has not—and, once aroused in a fight, he was a ruthless opponent. It seems to be the case that the president's reform program grew primarily out of his convictions as a teacher of young men. He did not, for instance, deliberately set about to attack the Princeton clubs, but when the host gathered for the defense of an aristocratic institution because it was aristocratic, when they denounced him as a confessor, a leveler and a Socialist, the innate democracy of the man flamed up, and the fight ceased to be a debate over educational ideals, having become an irreconcilable conflict between democracy and privileged wealth.

President Wilson continued to expound his ideas on the subject of the social organization of the university when invited to do so at gatherings of the alumni in various cities, but he made no aggressive campaign. The preceptorial system, in spite of the growing prejudice against it, continued in vogue, the necessary funds being voted by the trustees.

(Continued next week)

## Police Station Notes

(Crowded out last week)  
A large, heavy set, colored woman, giving her name as Mrs. Lizzie Lane was taken from train No. 43 Friday afternoon by the officers after receiving a telegram from the United States Attorney in Omaha. She is the proprietress of a bawdy house a Sheridan. She stated here that her inmates had left her house and she went to Omaha, where she arranged for others who were to follow her to Sheridan. She was supposed to have been accompanied by a colored man about fifty years of age but he was not located. The District Attorney arrived Monday with the two girls and they were taken in company with "Big Liz" to Bayard, where she had a preliminary hearing and was bound over to the federal court under the Mann act, in bonds of \$3,000, which she could not furnish.

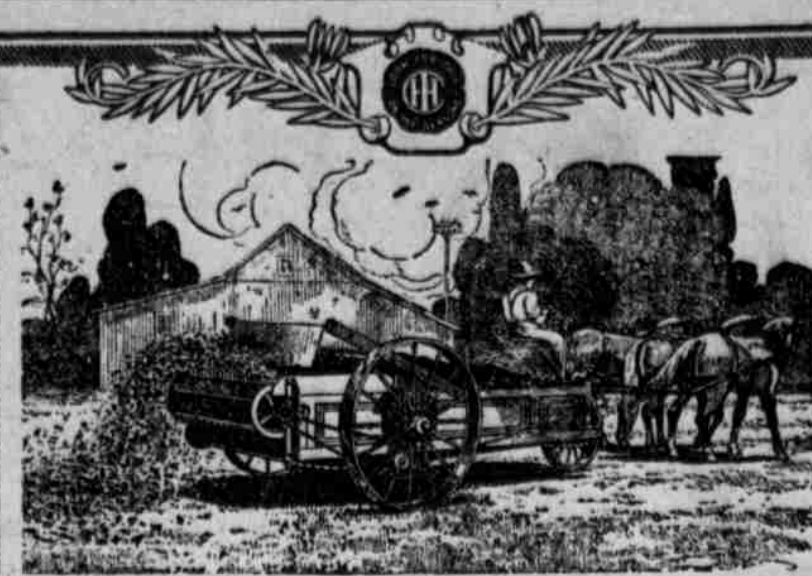
Two men who undoubtedly looked for an easy time during the balance of the winter arrived in town last week and at once got busy trying to do some petty stealing. They gave the names of Joe Harris and James Sullivan. They entered the store of W. M. Wilson Monday morning and asked the proprietor for some gasoline. While he was in the rear one of them, Harris, reached over the counter and appropriated a watch, valued at \$12, and left, leaving Sullivan in the store. Wilson at the watch a little later and surmised the police, who found that they had taken a freight train going west. They were apprehended at Hemingford and Sheriff Cal Cox went up in an auto, returning with them. Harris was given fifteen days in the county jail and Sullivan was let go.

Tuesday afternoon Burlington headquarters notified the police station that a man was selling or trying to sell some trousers down in the yards to the Greek section hands. Marshal El Laing and Deputy Sheriff Miller went to the yards and found James Sullivan with four pairs of Sweet-Orr trousers in his possession. The Greeks testified that he had offered to sell the entire four pairs to them for three dollars. He told the officers that he bought twelve pairs with him from Iowa and that the rest were buried in the yards. In police court yesterday morning M. Norton testified that the trousers were from his stock and showed his price mark on the tags. Sullivan made no defense and was sent to the county jail for thirty days with instruction that he be put to work. The sheriff stated that Sullivan had real fits or was shamming and that he would have him examined to find out what was the matter.

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Adv-1892-Mar-6-27

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