



Pearl W. Geer and the Liberal University.

[From Freethought Magazine for June.]

Pearl W. Geer, whose portrait appears as the frontispiece of this number of this magazine, is a young man of only twenty-seven years of age this present month, but he is about as well known to the Freethinkers of this country as any other Freethinker of America, and this knowledge of him extends to foreign countries. This extensive acquaintance with him comes from the fact that he is the special agent in the work of building up the Liberal University established in Silverton, Oregon, the only University of the kind in the world. And we consider it the most important work the Freethinkers have ever undertaken, and every friend of Freethought should assist Mr. Geer in the undertaking to the extent of his or her ability, for if it is to prove a success it must be by the assistance and co-operation of people who are free from superstition. No others can be expected to aid it. And as there are very few rich men who are outspoken and independent Freethinkers, the contributions must evidently come mostly from poor men, and therefore it is very necessary that each Liberal contribute what he can afford to. There are probably 50,000 professed Freethinkers in this country, and if each would give the small sum of \$2 it would give this new institution \$100,000, which would place it on a firm and permanent basis. Only think of it. If each one of us will contribute this small sum, we will have an institution in this country that will be the light of the world. An institution that will attract the attention of every intelligent friend of Human Progress in all civilized countries.

It may be said that the old and well-established colleges and universities are becoming very free, and are doing much to liberate the public and the minds of their students from medieval superstition, and that we therefore need no others. That they are more Liberal than formerly we readily admit, and we rejoice that we can truthfully make the admission, nevertheless the truth compels us to say that there is not, in this

country at least, if there is in any country, an educational institution that is entirely free to teach the whole truth, and that is what a University should be able to do. For instance, suppose a professor in our most Liberal college should say to his class of students studying theology, that God had no more to do with writing the Bible, or inspiring men to write it, than in writing Shakespeare. He would be immediately discharged and turned out into the world to starve. Now, there is not an intelligent professor in any university in the world who does not know that such a statement is as true as that four and four are eight.

Cornell University, established some thirty years ago, it was claimed was to be a perfectly free institution, where the truth could be freely taught. And during the first years of its existence it gave great encouragement to the friends of Universal Mental Liberty. It engaged as its teachers such independent thinkers as Andrew D. White, Prof. Russell, Prof. Oliver, Prof. Goldwin Smith, Prof. Geo. William Curtis, and Prof. James Russell Lowell, and others of less note, but equally as liberal in their religious views. These broad-minded men did not propose to attack any creed, or introduce any new religious ideas, only to teach scientific, demonstrated truth, and to keep the institution as the founders intended, free from sectarianism. These grand men, who were among the truest, bravest and noblest this country ever produced, tried their best to carry out the grand work they had undertaken, but they had not more than got well started in their work before the bigots of the country commenced to scent heresy, and charge that Cornell University was run by pagans and haters of Christianity, and a united effort was made by orthodox Christians everywhere to destroy that institution, and in a few years they succeeded in driving out of that University most of these Liberal professors, and those whom they did not drive out they put a muzzle on. Prof. Oliver felt compelled to join the Unitarian Church, that he might be known as a Christian, notwithstanding this good man (no better ever lived), was always at heart as Liberal in his views as Col. Ingersoll.

To prove the truth of what we have above stated about the attack made by the Christians on Cornell University, we will here quote from a letter from the President of the University, Andrew D. White, published in the Evening Post in November, 1870:

From the day when Mr. Cornell's offer was made to give a large sum to establish the university, there have been a few persons eager in scenting out heresy. Before a stone was laid or an officer chosen, it was hinted that the institution was to

be dangerous. The same bitterness was shown against it which was shown against Oberlin College, now widely known as an evangelical stronghold.

As soon as a word was uttered, the open war began. The President of the University had the honor to be first attacked. Words were put into his mouth which he never uttered, words were suppressed which he had uttered, and reports were circulated that he was very unsound, although at that time he was a trustee of Hobart College and professor elect in Yale College, two institutions whose "soundness" will hardly be brought into question.

Professor Agassiz was denounced, although every scientific man knows him to be the great bulwark of the Church against the Darwinian development theory. He was attacked for those very doctrines regarding creation which are now conceded in the orthodox book of the Rev. Dr. Thompson.

Professor Goldwin Smith was also attacked, although one of the most self-sacrificing and truly religious men, and a communing church member.

Professors George William Curtis and James Russell Lowell were attacked, although their lectures were purely literary; and, to cap the climax, heresy was detected in the earnest prayer at recent public exercises, though made by a pastor whose orthodoxy was never before questioned, and who is a trustee of one of the most venerable evangelical colleges in the land.

Our Resident Faculty have fared no better. Though selected from the leading Christian Colleges of various denominations; though all bore the highest commendations from the faculties of those institutions; though all, so far as I know, are members of or attendant upon Christian churches, portions of the community have been led to believe that these men are plotting against Christianity.

Of all this, sir, I make not the slightest complaint. Those of us who have pledged our lives and fortunes to this building up of what we think a better and broader university education expected such attacks—and perhaps they are the most sure signs that the work is going on well. We simply commend these facts to every thoughtful man and woman.

That was the kind of treatment that Cornell University received from the orthodox Christians, just because it proposed to be non-sectarian. Bigotry is not quite as rampant today as it was then, but no institution would now be allowed to live where Christians had the least control, that should declare itself as the especial advocate of ascertained truth on all questions. In saying this we are not in the least blaming the professors of the present established educational institutions. They are mostly men of broad and liberal ideas and are doing the best they can under the circumstances—the best they can and keep their places.

Thus it appears conclusively that we need a university built up and established by emancipated men and women, where Christian superstition has not the least control—

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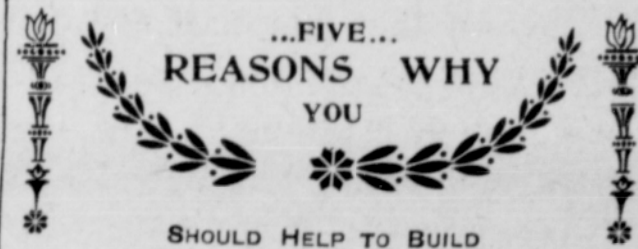
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