

New York, April 20, 1915

To President Butler and the Trustees' Committee  
on Education of Columbia University

Dear Sirs:

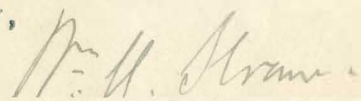
Desiring, on the completion of my sixty-fifth year and at the close of twenty years service as the Seth Low Professor of History, to modify my relations with my Alma Mater, I request you to note that according to Section 67 of the Statutes I may be considered as entitled to retire from the active duties of my chair. On October 1st, 1916 I shall have completed forty years of laborious professorial service and at that date I request that my activity as a research professor be emphasized by a change in my title to that designation. May I likewise say that inasmuch as I hope to serve Columbia throughout life in whatever way, except teaching, may be open to me, publicly or privately, I shall hope for the active support of the University alike in assigning to me not only the largest possible remuneration but also suitable service. The title of emeritus would be most distasteful to me and I trust there will be no formal parting or announcement of superannuation.

Appended to this letter is a memorandum, private and confidential, referring to the condition of the department of history as I see it. May I respectfully ask your careful consideration of its suggestions?

With the hearty expression of great respect and the highest regard, I am,

Yours sincerely,

and the highest regard, I am,



Memorandum

appended to a letter addressed on April 20, 1915 to the President and the Trustees' Committee on Education of Columbia University by William M. Sloane, Seth Low Professor of History

and improvement by normal evolution and its bases were not to be destructively attacked. Now for I have been successful

My devotion to Columbia is and has been that of a loyal son, loyal to what I conceive has been her great station and to her work in general; that, particularly, in the department of history. It requires no argument to prove that Columbia University is the great power plant of the metropolis and a mainspring of influence in the nation. Nor is it controvertible that whatever battles range among the initiated about the scope and value of history the world at large rightly considers its field to be fixed and its subject matter as central to all education, liberal or vocational. For this reason the character of historical instruction is carefully scrutinized by the intelligent public. Throughout its glorious career this university has held the middle course of progressive conservatism in matters of faith and morals; its motto has been progress on the line of tradition. Among the names of the truly great which adorn its history there is not one of a reckless radical.

When summoned from a lucrative and honorable position in Princeton to be head and director of our historical department, I understood that my acceptance of the difficult task was a notification to all interested that new conditions were to be a reaffirmation of an unbroken policy. The social order as represented by family, state and church in the forms established by the experience of mankind during a The social order as represented by family, state and church

long evolution and, as I believe, by the laws of God was not to be rashly attacked as far as our instruction went. Our fullest sympathies were to be enlisted for its preservation and improvement by normal evolution and its bases were not to be destructively attacked. How far I have been successful in maintaining this policy it is for others to judge. But, in retiring from the position I have held, my earnest desire is that in readjusting the department there be a vigorous effort corresponding in this respect to that made twenty years ago.

The leaders in the history departments of Yale, Chicago, Pennsylvania, and Princeton are men about whose position on fundamental questions there can be no doubt, and Harvard, like Princeton, has a clergyman in the chair of mediaeval history. Nowhere is there quite so pronounced a liberalism as that of certain among my colleagues. In the active propaganda of this liberalism there is some danger lest there arise a reciprocal misapprehension between the university and the supporters of its traditions. Freedom of thought and speech is sacred, but there is an open question as to the platform from which subversive doctrines, even if approved after trial, should be proclaimed. Instructive the tendency of which may be by many considered subversive of the principles for which we have always stood is quite another matter from liberty; as on occasion I have explained to my colleagues with some emphasis. Personally I am not apprehensive, but nevertheless my first suggestion is that search be made for a clerical professor of settled opinion or that a layman of institutions, economics and ethics; indeed they emphasize nevertheless my first suggestion is that search be made for a

widely known and pronounced views be chosen as my successor in the work of instruction.

The second matter I wish to emphasize is that the gaps in the department be filled at once. Professors Dunning and Osgood are men no longer young, although they have quite certainly many years of the best possible service before them; both are admirable men, far above the average as scholars, teachers and writers. I respect and admire them, and commend their work without qualification. Likewise of the younger men, Professors Shepherd and Schuyler, each in his way, seem to stand for the Columbia idea and both are excellent teachers; their writing is valuable as far as it goes. Professor Hayes is invaluable in his way and place; a stimulating, energetic, broadminded. He is that rare and extraordinary combination, a Roman Catholic and a Free-mason; being a devoted fraternity man he is in close touch with undergraduate life. Nevertheless he is by birth and tradition not entirely a representative Columbia man.

For Professors Robinson and Shotwell I have a great liking personally, and a sincere regard. The former is a zealous free thinker however and the latter, though not ardent in this respect, is sympathetic in a departure, well enough perhaps in principle but in extent amounting almost to a secession and to the creation of a new department; to wit, the establishment of elaborate courses in the history of thought and culture. In these courses they teach didactically and from a modernist point of view, philosophy, politics, institutions, economics and ethics; indeed they emphasize and from a modernist point of view, philosophy, politics,

everything except history, as their colleagues understand it. Neither is expert in any one of the subjects as discursively treated, and the departments of economics and sociology have been disturbed by the trespass. Such instruction in such extent seems to me a reversion to the notorious and discredited "Kulturgeschichte" of Germany. Professor Robinson's collected essays on "The New History" is a book which leaders of liberal thought approve and I hold that the irregulars have a right to be heard. If we keep a proper balance in manning the department we need not be unduly anxious. We dare not be this narrow minded. Professor Robinson has been a prolific writer of high class text books. Professor Shotwell promised earlier to be a philosophic and discursive historian but so far he has published a small volume of lectures and many encyclopaedia articles. He was an assistant in planning the last edition of the "Britannica". Neither has made substantive addition to the sum of higher scholarship in history. Under Professor Botsford our work in Ancient History commands the respect of the country and the world. He is a closet scholar of the finest type, an investigator second to none in industry, accuracy, and grasp. He has written school books but his abundant contributions in the highest sphere are commanding, alike in soundness and insight. Had the development of our work in early and late mediaeval, and in early modern European history taken the form expected under Professors Robinson and Shotwell, and which it has in other universities of the same rank, my conscience would have been easier. Yet there is a limit to and which it has in other universities of the same rank, my

guidance. Strong men must work as they are constituted and both these colleagues are men of quality, men entitled to their own opinions and the regulation of their own conduct. and behaviour, but the tremendous throes of the Dominion for a During the four or five years since Professor Osgood began to withdraw from the teaching of English history we have been lamentably deficient in opportunity for the study and investigation of Anglo-American history, institutions and laws. This was the price we had to pay for his high specialization in Colonial history. Our sins of omission in this respect are grievous. Considering the origins of Columbia and its position before the country there is a categorical imperative on us to repent and do our duty. For the moment we are offering a patch work and a makeshift. What should be the great central axis is a weak driving shaft in temporary substitution for the new and reliable one we must put in place. We are unsurpassed in American history, the whole field of which is brilliantly covered by Shepherd, Osgood and Dunning. But for this fine structure we have a foundation of sand; there is no thorough training in the sources and development of English history. In this respect Yale is the leader. It is my earnest hope that we secure at the earliest date a scholar of the first rank. In case this prove impossible let us use a travelling fellowship and put a promising youth in training at once. I could render would be but a modest

acknowledgment By the professor of English history must be a native-born and devoted American. We already have two Canadians in the department. Both are irreproachable in speech and behaviour, but the tremendous throes of the Dominion for a nationality rather hostile to our own must necessarily appeal to generous natives of it and influence their attitude toward both English, American and Canadian history. Our northern neighbor has a standpoint as much its own as any transatlantic land. At this time it is peculiarly true that our professorships in history should be held by strong American men.

Finally I confess to qualms of conscience as regards my own field; late modern and contemporary European history. Contemporary politics is not history and students of international relations might well attend the courses of our great master, John Bassett Moore, especially if he were to make one of them mainly historical. I hope therefore that the Seth Low chair may be reserved for the foundation man, so to speak, the professor of English history.

If I am permitted to complete twenty years of active professorial work in Columbia, as I trust may be the case, perhaps in the interval such of my suggestions as meet your approval may be entirely or partly carried out. My services in every effort to that end are always at your disposal; any assistance I could render would be but a modest

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