

Campbell R. White

Embassy of the United States of America
Berlin.

~~Handwritten signature~~ (78)
no answer

November 13, 1900.

President Harper, LL.D.,
University of Chicago,
Chicago, Ill.

My dear Dr. Harper :

I have just seen in the Chicago papers pictures of your new University Commons Building, and wish to congratulate you upon the beauty of the plan, as thus shown. For a long time I have been endeavoring to bring about the erection of buildings of a similar sort, and on the same general plan, at Cornell, and have also sought to induce the Yale people, in the erection of their Alumni Hall and Auditorium, to follow the same general lines which you have adopted.

For years I have been greatly interested

in the matter of University architecture ; and, while lack of means, and indeed of proper architects, in the early days of Cornell University, prevented me from carrying out these ideas, I took pains during various visits at Oxford and Cambridge to secure photographs, plans, measurements, etc.

When Vanderbilt Hall and the Phelps Tower were to be erected at Yale, I had much correspondence with President Dwight on the subject, and various ideas which I proposed were adopted, much, I think, to the improvement of those buildings.

Allow me, then, to make one or two suggestions, to which possibly you will give attention, if they have not already occurred to you.

First. The windows in your great dining hall should be high enough to allow ample space for portraits and busts of University worthies below them, as, for example, ^{at} Christ's

Church, Oxford, and at the Harvard Alumni Hall.

Secondly. By all means avoid the mistake which Harvard made in not following good old English example, and have an ample ^{and possibly two of them} fire-place, in which a blazing fire of wood or coal can be had on cold winter days. As you must know, this is a delightful feature of the Halls at the English colleges, giving not only a wonderful cheerfulness, but aiding ventilation as no machinery can do. As you probably have noticed, old dining halls are very likely to have a rancid, unpleasant smell, unless the ventilation is very thorough, indeed ; and nothing secures it so well as an open fireplace.

Thirdly. It seems to me that your tower is rather squat. I would certainly add a third to its present height.*

Fourthly. Why not have niches, or at least some corbels and canopies on the buttresses and elsewhere, which your graduating classes can some day fill with statues of

*Compare Magdalen Tower, Oxford.

benefactors of the human race. After they have, like the Harvard graduating classes, filled the windows with such memorials, there will then be a chance to do something with statues, like those in the new Museum at Oxford of Lord Bacon and others, in Portland stone, which are really very beautiful and effective.

I regard your plan as of great value to the whole country, as a model, having long felt that we cannot do better in our College and University architecture than to develop it out of the Academic Architecture of our forefathers. The Academic Architecture of the Tudor and Jacobean periods is, in my opinion, the most beautiful for academic purposes that the world has seen, just as our language at that period was at its best.

With renewed congratulations and all good wishes, I remain,

Yours faithfully,

A. Q. D. White

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Pres. Harper, #2.

P.S.I notice that you are thinking of having a chime in your tower, and hope that you will do so. In that case, it would be well to have the tower bear a clock, chiming the hours and quarters, like that in our tower in Cornell ; but, permit me as one who has had considerable experience with bells, to recommend you to consider carefully whether you will have a chime of, say, ten bells or more, or, on the other hand, a peal of four large bells, giving the Common Chord, for which there is much to be said.

V. D. W.

