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A Seat of Negro Learning

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A Seat of Negro Learning

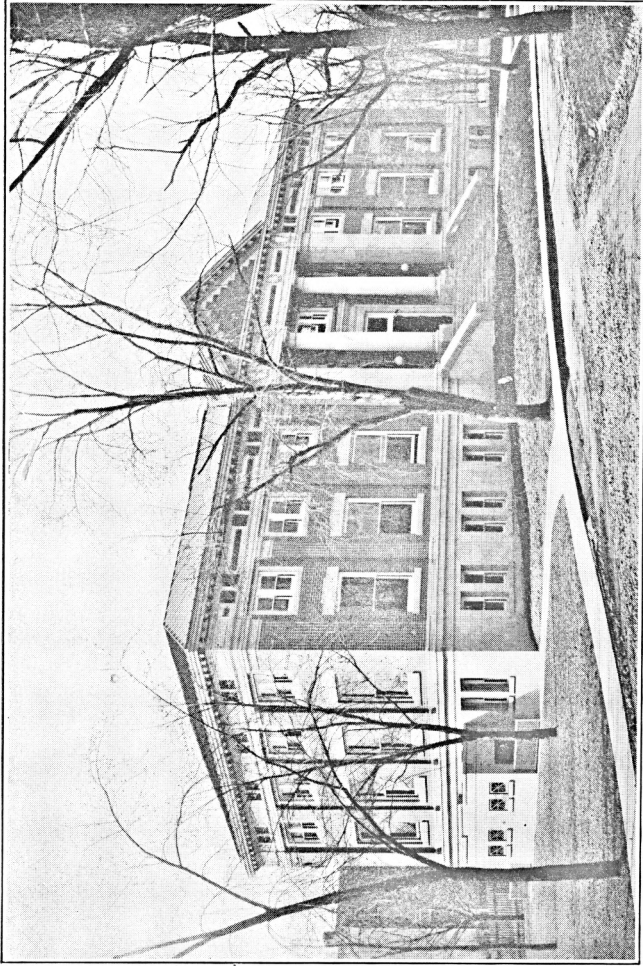
Howard University Draws Scholars from Many Lands

BY CHARLES H. WESLEY, PH.D.

THE DEMAND for professional leadership, which was increasing rapidly among the Negroes of America throughout the nineteenth century, gave rise to the beginnings of collegiate education for this group. When liberal-minded Americans began to realize that preachers, teachers, lawyers and physicians must be supplied for the Negro population, the basis was created for its higher education. In 1849 Avery College was established at Allegheny, Pennsylvania. In 1854 Ashmun Institute, now Lincoln University, was founded in Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 1856 Wilberforce University was incorporated and located near Xenia, Ohio. It was the first institution for higher education controlled by Negroes themselves. After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, schools combining learning and labor were established in all parts of the south. Out of the throes of Civil War there came Atlanta University at Atlanta; Shaw University at Raleigh, North Carolina; Fisk University at Nashville, Tennessee; and Howard University at Washington, D. C.

Although there were educational institutions in America, which during this period bore the name of university, there were few universities in the modern sense of the term until within the decade after the Civil War. It is not strange, therefore, that these schools for the education of Negroes had been ambitiously called universities. They combined the best features of the home, the church and the school, and not the university features of today. But the fathers of this movement had faith in the future.

The demand for Negro education before the Civil War was based upon the developing needs of the Negro population. The demand after the war was based upon the urgent necessities of the moment as well as upon the future. There was not only a free population for whom educational provision must be made but a larger group of persons freed by the exigencies of war for whom educational advantages must be provided. They had flocked into the large centers of



The Howard University Library

population and created problems which could be solved only by the Freedmen's Bureau, the Freedmen's Aid Societies and the missionary organizations. From Virginia, Maryland and the border states, thousands came to the capital of the nation. They were housed in barracks, homes were erected and a community projected in the southeastern part of the city, known as Barry Farm. The presence of this large group in the city, forming about one-third of the population, emphasized the necessity both of educating the masses and of preparing trained leaders for them. Day and night schools providing elementary instruction were established, and large numbers crowded into these schools. The most important of these early schools was the school organized by Miss Myrtilla Miner. It was known as "The Institution for the Education of the Colored Youth." In 1879 this school became a part of the school system of the District of Columbia and was henceforth known as The Myrtilla Miner Normal School.

It was apparent to the many interested philanthropists and missionaries that the educational opportunities for the freedmen would not be complete without an institution in which the leaders for the group could be trained. Out of this observation, there came the determination to found schools for higher education. Of these schools, Howard University is the only one which has justly measured up to the prophecy of its title as university. It is today the largest and most effective institution of college and university grade engaged in the education of Negro population. Started originally as a local institution, it is today national and international in the scope of its work, its student body and its influence.

The idea which gave birth to Howard University seems to have started in a missionary meeting on November 17, 1866, at the First Congregational Church of Washington, D. C., with its pastor, Rev. C. B. Boynton, presiding. It is interesting to note in passing that the connection between Howard University and the First Congregational Church of Washington has been maintained through the years. Three of its pastors, Reverends Boynton, Rankin and Newman, accepted the presidency of Howard University, and the formal exercises of the school were held at the church in the earlier years.

At subsequent meetings, it was proposed that assistance should be secured from the Freedmen's Bureau and that three chairs of instruction should be established at the university, (1) Evidences and Biblical Interpretation under Rev. E. W. Robinson, (2) Biblical History and Geography under Rev. D. B. Nichols and (3) Anatomy and Physiology under Dr. Silas Loomis. It was also proposed that

the university should bear the name of Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, who had been active in its promotion and who was regarded as "The American Philanthropist, the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, the true friend of the downtrodden and oppressed of every color and nation of the earth." The charter for the Howard University, as it was termed, was passed by Congress and received the signature of President Johnson on March 2, 1867. This day is observed at the university from year to year with appropriate ceremonies as Charter Day.

On May 1, 1867, the Normal and Preparatory Departments opened with five students in a rented frame structure on the east side of Georgia Avenue south of W Street. A short time afterwards, the incorporators obligated themselves for the purchase of 150 acres, which included the present site of the university, for \$150,000. The bulk of the purchase money was furnished by the Freedmen's Bureau. With other funds secured from the same source, the Main Building, Miner Hall for girls, Clark Hall for boys, a medical building and homes for professors were erected. The principal difficulties of the university in these early years were financial ones. However, in spite of these obstacles, by 1872 the university included the following departments: Normal, preparatory, musical, theological, military, industrial, commercial, collegiate, law, and medicine.

After the work of the Freedmen's Bureau was discontinued, General Howard resigned as president of the university. The trustees refused to accept his resignation, created the office of vice-president and gave General Howard an indefinite leave of absence. Prof. John M. Langston, of the Howard Law School, was elected to the position of vice-president. He was the only Negro to act in the capacity of president, although from the legal view he was only a vice-president. As one contemporary phrased it, the thought behind this movement was "that the experiment of placing an able colored man in this high position would stimulate his own race and the minds of white philanthropists to sustain the institution in its perilous struggles." After an uneventful term of office, Mr. Langston resigned in 1875.

Then followed the terms of Edward P. Smith, S. C. Pomeroy, Frederick W. Fairchild and William W. Patton, either as presidents or acting presidents. Under the presidency of Reverend Patton the important step was taken which linked the university to the Federal Government again as a recipient of its aid. Congress appropriated \$10,000 toward the current expenses of the institution in 1879. In

subsequent years the congressional appropriations have been increased as the university needs were stressed. During the Reverend Patton's term, also, the gifts of individual donors were large. The Reverend Patton was succeeded in 1889 by the Rev. J. E. Rankin, the pastor of the First Congregational Church of Washington. During his period of service as president, a residence was erected for the president, and the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel was built by funds secured from private sources. Internal reorganization strengthened the pedagogical work of the university during this period. The term of President Gordon was a period of halting but steady progress. President Thirkield gave a new material development to the institution, and President Newman infused a new spirit with emphasis upon things intellectual and spiritual. The congressional appropriations for Howard University were increased, new buildings were added to the college campus, the number of students increased and the efficiency of college instruction was improved markedly during these two administrations.

When President Newman resigned, the Rev. J. Stanley Durkee of Brockton, Massachusetts, was elected president in 1918. During his administration important steps were taken in the development of the university. The secondary schools were discontinued and Howard University was started exclusively as a school of collegiate grade, new buildings were erected, including a new home economics building and dining hall combined and a gymnasium, the quarter system was substituted for the semester system, a registrar's office was established, a Department of Physical Education was created, the college was placed on the approved list of colleges and preparatory schools of the Middle States and Maryland, and the Dental School received an A-grade rating by the Board of Regents of the State of New York. Several reorganizations of the college have taken place during this administration in an effort to secure the most effective plan of operation. The offices of secretary and treasurer of the university were combined and the office of secretary-treasurer was created. The selection of Dr. Emmett J. Scott for this position has been amply justified by his administration of this office. Up to this period the university treasurers had been of the white race and the secretaries had been selected from both races. In 1919 these offices were consolidated and placed under Dr. Scott, who also serves as business manager of the university.

During the fifty-eight years of its existence the university has grown in departments of study, in number of students and in fluence until today it is not only the largest university of its



The Chapel at Howard University

in the world but also the only university among Negroes which rightfully merits the name of university because of the scope of its work. Through the School of Medicine, the School of Dentistry, the School of Religion, the School of Law, the College of Education, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Applied Science, leaders in the arts, the sciences and the professions are being prepared and sent forth to larger service among their people.

The enrollment of students has increased greatly within the past twenty years. In the school year, 1901-1902, there were 939 students; in 1911-1912, there were 1,453; in 1922-1923, there were 2,100; in 1924-1925, there were 2,064.

These students came from thirty-six states of the Union, and from Africa, the British West Indies, British Guiana, Canada, Central America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Porto Rico, the Republic of Colombia and the Virgin Islands. It is apparent then that the work of Howard University is more than national in its influence. All of the student activities of college life are maintained—football, baseball, basketball, track meets, tennis, dramatics, debating, glee clubs, a university choir, the R. O. T. C. Band, the German, French, History, Chemistry and other clubs. There are nine national college fraternities represented with chapters at Howard University. Six of these are for male students and three for female students. As the problem of housing so large a number of students is a serious one, the fraternities and the sororities maintain houses for their membership.

Thirty departments of study are included in the college, in all of which the highest standards of collegiate instruction are maintained. At Howard University there is gathered the largest group of scholarly teachers of Negro youth in the world. It is worthy of mention that one of the first research fellowships granted by the National Research Council was given to the Professor of Zoology at Howard University. The presentation by Dr. J. E. Moorland of books and pamphlets pertaining to the Negro has made possible the most complete university collection of Negro-Americana in existence, and the opportunities for research in this field of history have been greatly increased. Outstanding scholars of the Negro group have been connected with Howard University, and, with the proper support and direction, Howard University will become the center of Negro scholarship, research and teaching in America. In 1918-1919 the faculty numbered 118; in 1921-1922 there were 163, and in 1924-1925 there were 151. The degrees represented, of an advanced nature,

are 14 degrees of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), 39 degrees of Master of Arts (M.A.), 9 degrees of Doctor of Divinity (D.D.), and 3 degrees of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.).

There are nearly 6,000 graduates of Howard University. They are scattered throughout the world and are engaged mainly in professional activities. Some are even in the Far East and in Europe, others in Africa and the Islands of the Seas, but the bulk of them may be found in America. When Howard's doors were opened there were no racial lines drawn, there were no tests as to creed and no bar as to sex. It was one of the earliest universities of this type in America. The first student groups were composed of members of both races. A member of Congress observed its first groups of students and remarked that "in this institution, as in no other in the land, it is believed, the Anglo-Saxon, the Celt, the Indian, the Mongolian, the Greek and the African already sit, side by side, on the same bench. All races and both sexes have here in the pursuit of knowledge a fair and equal favor." The annual report of President Howard for 1872 stated that he had hoped "to preserve the cosmopolitan character of the university, drawing our pupils from all classes, conditions and nationalities." From this early tradition it has resulted, therefore, that the graduates of Howard University are of both races. There are college graduates and professional leaders in Washington and other communities, of the white population as well as of the Negro population who owe the foundation of their successes to the training received at Howard. One of them, now a missionary in China, returned a few months ago and in the college chapel gave testimony of the value which he had received at Howard and demonstrated his loyalty to his Alma Mater in the fervor of his address. While no distinctions have been made in the past, it is now true that the great service of Howard University is really to Negro-Americans.

Howard University is accordingly unique among universities in its organization and its work. It is the only institution which offers standard collegiate courses in the arts, the sciences, education, engineering, architecture, domestic science, law, religion, medicine and music. It is the only coeducational institution for Negroes which does not offer any courses below the collegiate grade. It is the only institution having 2,000 Negro college students assembled in one university. It is the only university to encourage research among Negro students by the grant of fellowships and the opportunity to have the results of their research placed in permanent form.