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Rochester

ALUMNI

Review



In and Out of Bagdad

Medical College Developments

Quaint Quinby Quips

An Experience in Turbulent China

An Interesting Life of Service

Alumni Correspondence

Football and Basketball

Campus Happenings

December-January, 1923

Quaint Quinby Quips from Bygone Days

By H. DEAN QUINBY, '18

Grandson of Gen. Isaac F. Quinby, Early Professor of Mathematics at University of Rochester

From a period before iron fences, art galleries, steam heat, football teams and co-eds, come several interesting anecdotes of one of the first professors of the University, Isaac Ferdinand Quinby who was born on a farm near Morristown, N. J., January 29, 1821.

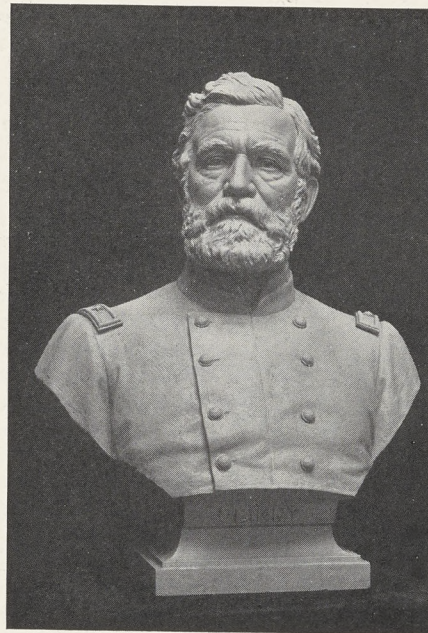
After his graduation from West Point with Ulysses S. Grant in the class of 1843, he saw service in the Mexican War and came to the newly established University of Rochester in 1851 as Professor of Mathematics, having resigned his commission in the army. The Civil War found him recalled to service, and after active participation in an arduous and successful campaign, he resigned his commission as Brigadier-General on December 31, 1863. He then held his professorship at Rochester until 1884 and died in September, 1891.

This fragmentary sketch of General Quinby's life serves to explain, in a measure, the peculiar elements which made his mind a fertile source of schemes that both tortured and amused his pupils and fellow professors. We see the happy prankish mind of the farmer boy, the dominating forceful mind of the military man and the keen analytical mind of the mathematician—an unusual combination. Short shrift was given those who "came not to learn," as his opening remark to every new class would indicate:

"If you came to learn, I will teach you; if not, I cannot."

It was seldom, if ever, that a man in his classes was successful at cribbing or

obtaining information from another, for even with his back to the class General



Bronze Bust of General Quinby in National Park, Vicksburg, Miss.

Quinby was prompt to detect it—and a caustic, "That will do," closed the performance. On a cold morning, when the wood-stove in the classroom was unable, even though red-hot, to get any heat to the feet of the pupils, their stamping of protest was quickly stopped by his surprise that so many of them were troubled with corns.

An old alumnus remembers the day when the fresh, balmy campus of early spring called more strongly than a class in Calculus. With several others he agreed that if the keyhole to the classroom was plugged, General Quinby could not use his

key—therefore no class—a nice piece of undergraduate reasoning even for those crude days. It just happened that the General arrived early, called the janitor, (probably Mr. Craigie) and by class time was quietly seated just *inside* the open door with a clear view down the corridor. About two of every five students coming in would look at the keyhole, then at the General, who caught their eyes with a smile that lasted all day.

Throughout his life General Quinby was a close friend of General Grant, several of whose letters are now treasured by the Quinby family. In one he sends his regards to the "baker's dozen of little Quinbys" (of whom there were just thirteen). When asked for his criticism of a treatise on Calculus, written by General Quinby, Grant wrote that in his

estimation "it was perfectly safe for any family bookshelf."

It has been difficult to connect these reminiscences because of the diversity of sources from which they have been obtained. In closing, the following letter should prove of interest. So far as is known, it has never before been published.

In 1866 the ladies of Rochester held a bazaar for the benefit of disabled soldiers. General Quinby, at the request of Mrs. Quinby, wrote to General Grant for a lock of his hair to be used in a raffle as one of the attractions of the sale. His reply follows:

"Chattanooga, Tenn.,
"December 13, 1866.

"My Dear Madam:—

"The letter of my old friend and classmate, your husband, requesting a lock of my hair, 'if the article is not growing scarce from age' is just received. I presume he means it to be put in an ornament (by the most delicate of hands no doubt) and sold at the bazaar for the benefit of disabled soldiers and their families.

"I am glad to say the stock is yet abundant as ever, though time, or some other cause, is beginning to intersperse here and there a reminder that winters have passed. The object for which this little request is made is so praiseworthy that I cannot refuse it, even though I do, by granting it, expose the fact to the ladies of Rochester that I am no longer a boy.

"Hoping that the citizens of your city may spend a happy week, commencing to-morrow, and that the fair may remunerate most abundantly, I remain

"Very truly yours
(Signed) "U. S. GRANT,
"Major-General, U. S. A."

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Some Kindly Observations from Rossiter Johnston

Editor of Rochester Alumni Review:—

I have read thoroughly your first number, and, while I find much in it that pleases me, one thing pleases most especially. That is condensed in a dozen words: "We crave contributions, and don't be afraid to sign your name to them."

You may have observed that every family—though living in a home that is

pitifully devoid of literature—feels at ease if it has a large Bible and an unabridged dictionary. With these, though they may never open them, they feel that they have the law and the gospel in the house, and are hence content. So I, though I may seldom or never wish to occupy a bit of space in your columns, feel very comfortable to have your generous invitation forever in the house. Thank you!

By the way, why do our journalists speak of contributors as "space writers?" Space requires not only length and breadth but thickness—depth. It might not be complimentary to speak of one as a surface writer, hence the substitution of "space" as a euphonism.

I don't think much of generalities, either as criticism or as commendation; therefore let me specify a little. The first thing that struck me on opening your periodical was the excellence of its typography. You have a good, clean page, in well chosen text type, the columns separated properly, and clear headlines carefully graded according to the greater or less importance of the articles. I especially like the type chosen for the headings. I must also speak approvingly of the make-up. Of your twenty-four pages, the first sixteen intimate to the reader, in every column, that the University of Rochester is an institution of learning, literature, science, scholarship. After that, the athletics—a judicious interpretation of the old saying, "Business before pleasure."

I wish that, instead of urging your contributors to sign their articles, you had made it a rule that they must do so. Letters from graduates should form an interesting feature of the REVIEW, and any such letter will have an added interest for many readers if they know that it was penned by a classmate or other college friend.

Your magazine reminds me that when I was in the University our only publication, besides the catalogue, was the *Interpres Universitatis*, a four-page annual issued by the junior class. I once saw a grandsire contemplating his six-foot grandson, whom he had not seen since his cradle days. He only said, "My gracious! How that boy has grown!"

—ROSSITER JOHNSON, '63.