

Princeton's Anti-Club Fight Stirs the University

Refusal of a Group of Sophomores to Accept Election in Any of the Clubs Brings Up a Perplexing Problem for Solution

TO many the refusal of a group of Princeton sophomores to stand for election to any of the eating clubs of that university, and the ensuing discussion, sometimes acrid, undoubtedly appears a tempest in a teapot, unduly magnified by the newspapers. But this revolt is in reality a revolt against a system, and if it develops, as it now promises to, a real start will have been made toward the solution of a problem, peculiar to American colleges, which as yet seems to have been solved nowhere—the problem of social organization within the student body.

Moreover, this student revolt has a general interest because it is significant of the times: Here is a university, a great, conservative university of the East, in which has developed a strong student movement inspired by radicalism, a criticism of tradition and the established order, and a desire for a greater and more genuine democracy.

Then there is the local interest—if a

should the system of eating clubs be abolished? It is a three-cornered problem. The undergraduate members stand upon one corner, the Faculty upon another, the alumni members upon the third. And the thorniest of these is the last. Their interest is financial, sentimental, and practical. There is many a graduate member who has been paying non-resident dues to his club for twenty, or even thirty, years, and, of course, the older clubs have a great body of graduate members. The clubs give these men a place where they feel that they have a right "to hang up their hat" when they come back for a visit to alma mater. But should they be willing to relinquish their financial and sentimental interests, there is still this practical interest left: Princeton village is a very small place with very limited hotel accommodations, and should many of the old "grads" return at the same time, as is the way with alumni, at graduation time and class reunions and the like, with the clubs abolished many of them would have "no place to go."

Having indicated what, for convenience, may be designated as the local interests, we can get back to the bigger question.

"Our problem here in Princeton is the problem of all American colleges—undergraduate organization," explained a member of the Faculty who has been taken into the confidence of the students on both sides of the controversy, and who is unofficially spokesman in this dispute for the university. "It is a problem which does not exist abroad. In Oxford and Cambridge a student's social life is fixed by his matriculation in a certain college. The fraternity or the college club, as we know it here, practically does not exist in the European universities. The Oxford man who matriculates, for instance, in Balliol College, studies, eats, and associates with the men of that college.

"The American universities have developed along entirely different lines, and the resultant social organization of the undergraduates leaves much to be desired. I wish, however, that you would put emphasis upon this: When I say that the social organization of the undergraduates leaves much to be desired I am in no wise indorsing the assertions that have been made that this present revolt of the sophomores is 'a revolt against snobbishness,' that it is a movement to 'establish democracy' here in Princeton. All of our student clubs have among their members, have among their officers, boys who have washed windows, mowed lawns, pressed clothes, in order to pay their way through college. With that hard fact before us I do not believe that any argument is needed to prove that democracy is the dominant spirit at Princeton.

"Of course, there is some snobbishness here, just as there will always be in any place where a large number of people are gathered together. It is also true that

the clubs serve to crystallize that snobbishness. But snobbishness is not an appreciable factor in either the life of the university or of any of its clubs. It is not a reason for the belief, almost unanimous with the Faculty, that a change of conditions in the clubs would be beneficial for the university.

"That reason is to be found in the fact that election to one of the clubs has come to have altogether too great an importance in the estimation of the students. Club election was not a reason that brought the boy to college, but once he is matriculated election to a club becomes the overshadowing feature of his freshman and sophomore years. It constitutes a great disturbing factor in his college life.

"Another reason against the continued existence of the clubs is that about 15 per cent. of the students who are technically qualified for membership get no 'bid' and are left clubless. In colleges where the fraternity system exists the number of students who are left out is much greater; and, according to the point of view, that minimizes or magnifies the situation here at Princeton. Some of the men included in this 15 per cent. may not care to join a club. Some of them are men of exceptional ability, but men who have developed slowly, who are shy, retiring, and not apt to make their mark quickly in the college. But whatever the reason, this 15 per cent. feels humiliated, feels that it has been marked as 'undesirable.'

"This is an unfortunate state of affairs, and one that has given the Faculty a great deal of concern. But while we deplore it and earnestly wish to do away with it, it none the less brings us face to face with the other side of the question—the natural and ineradicable tendency of people of demonstrated congeniality to associate more or less exclusively. It was this instinct that brought about the organization of the clubs, and that is the reason for their continued existence. And it must not be lost sight of in any discussion of the college club system."

A little history must here be interpolated, for without this background the present situation at Princeton cannot be understood. Up to about the middle of the last century Princeton maintained what was known as the Refectory, where the entire student body ate. Then some of the boys asked and obtained permission to eat in the village. Little groups of congenial spirits were formed, and gradually the Refectory became more and more deserted, until finally, in 1855, the college abandoned it entirely.

Some of these groups of congenial spirits developed into fraternities with restaurants and other club features. In 1876 Dr. McCosh, then President of the college, believing that the Greek letter societies were a harmful influence, abolished them. Once more the men began to form little groups to eat together. The old law held good; congeniality, mutual interest, was the thing that drew

them together. Ten, fifteen, or twenty of them would make arrangements with some boarding house keeper to feed them for the year.

In Princeton, as in most American colleges, class feeling is and always has been strong—freshmen only associating with freshmen, sophomores only with sophomores, and juniors and seniors more or less upon a footing of equality. Then ten, fifteen, or twenty companionable souls who had spent a year dining together would naturally come together the following year, and so on through their college course. A group might dine year after year in the same room, and inevitably it would acquire souvenirs, trophies, "properties." In other words, it was the germ of a club; and since juniors and seniors associated and ate together, a group of upper classmen could become self-perpetuating—the germ could develop into a real club.

It was out of just such an informal association that Ivy, the oldest of the Princeton clubs, was formed in 1879. In 1886 Cottage Club came into being, in 1892 Tiger Inn, same year Cap and Gown, in 1893 Colonial, 1895 Elm, 1898 Cannon, 1901 Campus, same year Quadrangle and Charter, 1902 Tower, 1904 Terrace and Key and Seal, 1908 Dial Lodge, 1912 Cloister Inn, 1913 Arch, and 1914 Gateway.

All of these clubs began in an informal, unpretentious manner, and as they have aged they have acquired traditions, prestige, and "desirability." The older the club the more students there are who want "to get a bid" from it to become a member. And there is no doubt that "to make" one of the older clubs does give a student a certain distinction over and above his fellows, which is a little at variance with an ideal democracy.

As has, however, already been pointed out, the great evil is to be found in the fact that election to one of the clubs has come to have altogether too great an importance in the estimation of the students, that it has become the overshadowing feature of his freshman and sophomore years. Many of the students covet the distinction of "getting a bid" to one of the older clubs, but all of them dread the apparent stigma of being one of the number (about forty-five students each year) who are unbidden to any club.

The method of selection to club membership makes this dread universal among the lower classmen. As has been said, neither the freshmen nor the sophomores nor the upper classmen fraternize. Then there is an iron-bound rule that no club member speak to any freshman or sophomore about club membership. This is partially to maintain the long-cherished distinction between upper and lower classmen; also to prevent "rushing" and the other evils of undue competition for desirable prospective members. The upper classmen "look over" the lower classmen, and thus decide on "the desirables."

On a certain day agreed upon by all

the clubs—usually in February—"bids" are sent out by mail. That is the first intimation that a man has that he is wanted in a certain club, or that he is wanted in any club at all. Also, until that day no club knows what men are to receive "bids" from any other club. Then follows the "club bicker." That is an institution difficult of comprehension to any one not Princeton bred. Perhaps it can be explained in this way: As the spirit of the Princeton clubs is congeniality, and as congenial groups which do not care to be disrupted will naturally form during the sophomore year, the "club bicker" was designed so that to a certain extent "bids" could be rearranged and groups admitted "in the lump." For this purpose "leaders" are appointed, whose business it is to line up "a section." Naturally, all of this ceremonial is preceded and accompanied by great tension and excitement.

To understand the development of the present situation in Princeton we must return for a few moments to college history.

Neither the freshmen nor the sophomores ever developed any real club. The freshmen were green, inexperienced youths, who suddenly found themselves among strangers, in new surroundings. Naturally, they could not be expected to take definite steps for their own welfare. The sophomores were a little more experienced, but they were already looking forward to membership in the clubs of the upper classmen.

The inexperience of the freshmen re-

portedance of being elected into the membership of one of the upper-class clubs, inasmuch as every member of the university will be assured of pleasant surroundings for his meals and leisure hours, together with that companionship which all young men crave.

The leaders in the movement are likewise leaders in their class, attractive and popular young men who in the ordinary course of events would have been sought for as members of the upper-class clubs. This is quite evident from the personnel of the committee they have chosen as their spokesmen, Mr. Bruce being Vice President of the sophomore class, Mr. Cleveland, the son of the late President Cleveland, having been President of his freshman class, Mr. Strater being one of

the influence of the men who could give them what they have not.

"With these groupings obviously comes unfortunate distinction. This feeling goes down into the lower classes who are not eligible for clubs and takes the form of segregation of the upper and lower classes, the latter either openly 'bootlicking' the former, or suffering private social chills in their attempt to stay neutral. Types are compressed into shape, so that many a man loses whatever he once had of personal development. Moreover, the economic waste of feeding two classes with seventeen small kitchens instead of two large ones is apparent.

"Finally, the purpose of a college

attempt to "repress" their "individuality," but shall confine their bids to men not in this movement. No one will oppose their desire to dine in commons during the next two years.

Let us not forget that our Princeton club system is generally held to be superior to the club or fraternity systems of any of our large colleges. Even if our clubs were abolished and the entire college dined in an atmosphere of utopian socialistic love, men would still continue to form cliques of congeniality, for such are the instincts of mankind, and such will they continue to be until reformers succeed in changing human nature.

Now, what is to be the solution of the problem?

It may be the group of revolutionists, which has already grown to fifty, will continue to gain accretions until it finally becomes the entire undergraduate body itself. With all the students dining in commons, the democratic ideal would be established, and the spiritual purpose of the revolution attained. Any such solution as this, however, takes no account of the club buildings, and of the obvious rights of the alumni.

Here are two suggestions made editorially by The Daily Princetonian:

First, have the university take over all the clubhouses. We are confident that when the movement has reached such dimensions as to warrant this step the money will be forthcoming. Then let the university sell the seven smallest buildings for private residences or apartment houses. In the remaining ten buildings all the members of the two upper classes could be fed very comfortably and without the slightest crowding, and with considerably more econ-

omy than at present, as now no club building is utilized to its capacity.

The university would then conduct these buildings as eating places, thus achieving the advantages of co-operative living and services. The buildings would be opened up and used as they were needed. For instance, the upper classmen would come down Prospect Street for a meal. The first comers would turn into the first club upon the street, and would continue to do so until that clubhouse was filled. Then a signal of some sort would notify the next comers that that building was filled, and that they should go down to the next one, whose doors would then be opened.

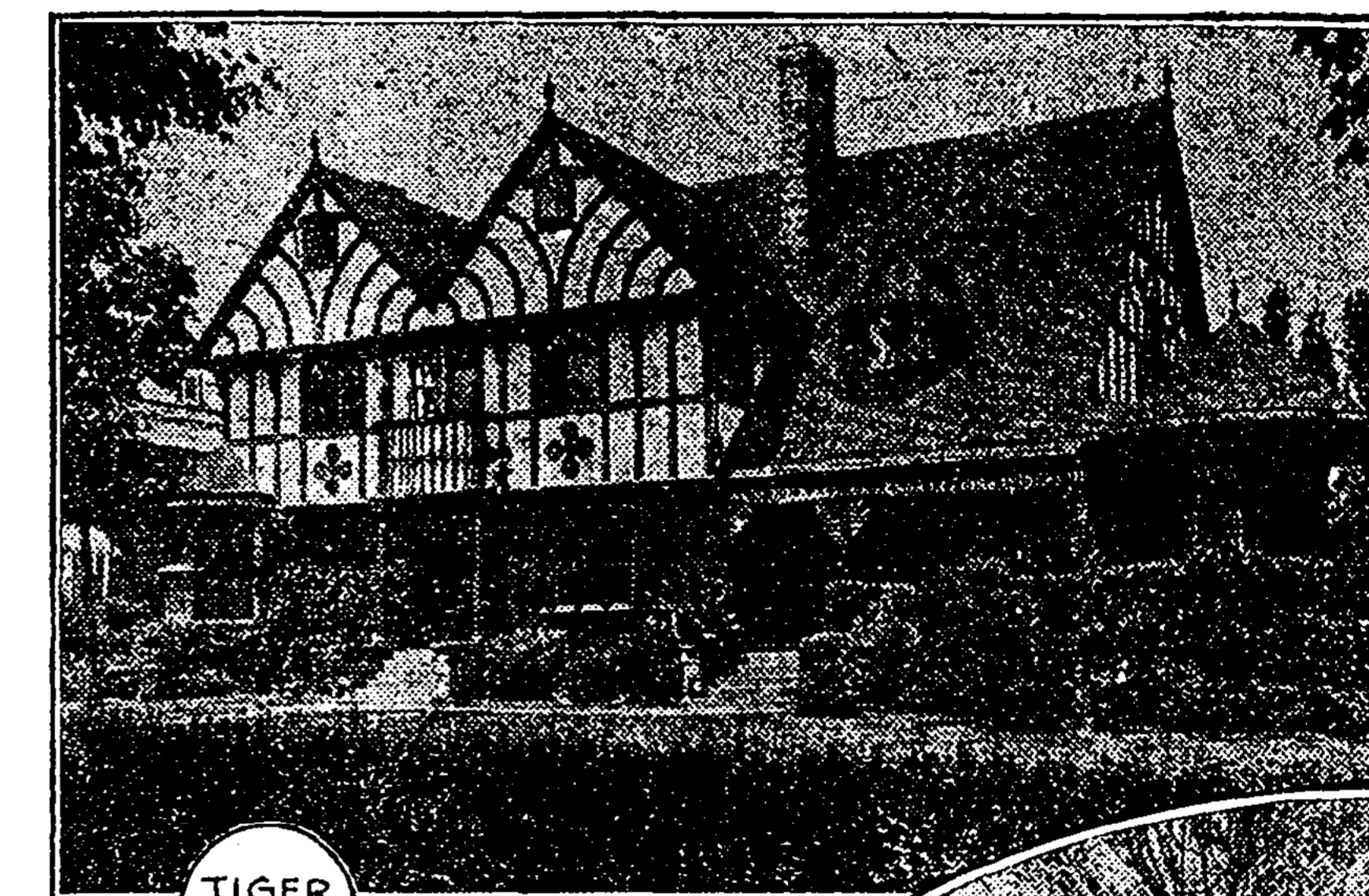
We offer this plan, of which the above is a very rough sketch, as a suggestion only. We do not reclaim it to be the only remedy possible; it merely seems to us at the present writing to be the best, and we submit it in the hope that it may form the basis for constructive discussion and be provocative of other and better proposals. There are several plans now being discussed which we believe to be superior to the arrangement in vogue at present.

One of these, for instance, is as follows: Have the university take over and operate, in a manner like the preceding, the ten biggest clubs to supply eating facilities for the two upper classes, five of which shall be used by the juniors and five by the seniors. Then let the sophomores submit to some appointed officer of the university applications for whatever group of their class they wish to eat with, and let these groups be formed as far as possible according to the applications and after that by lottery. Then let those groups take turns in occupying the clubhouses for certain definite lengths of time. Any two or more individuals could change about among the groups after obtaining the agreement of all concerned.

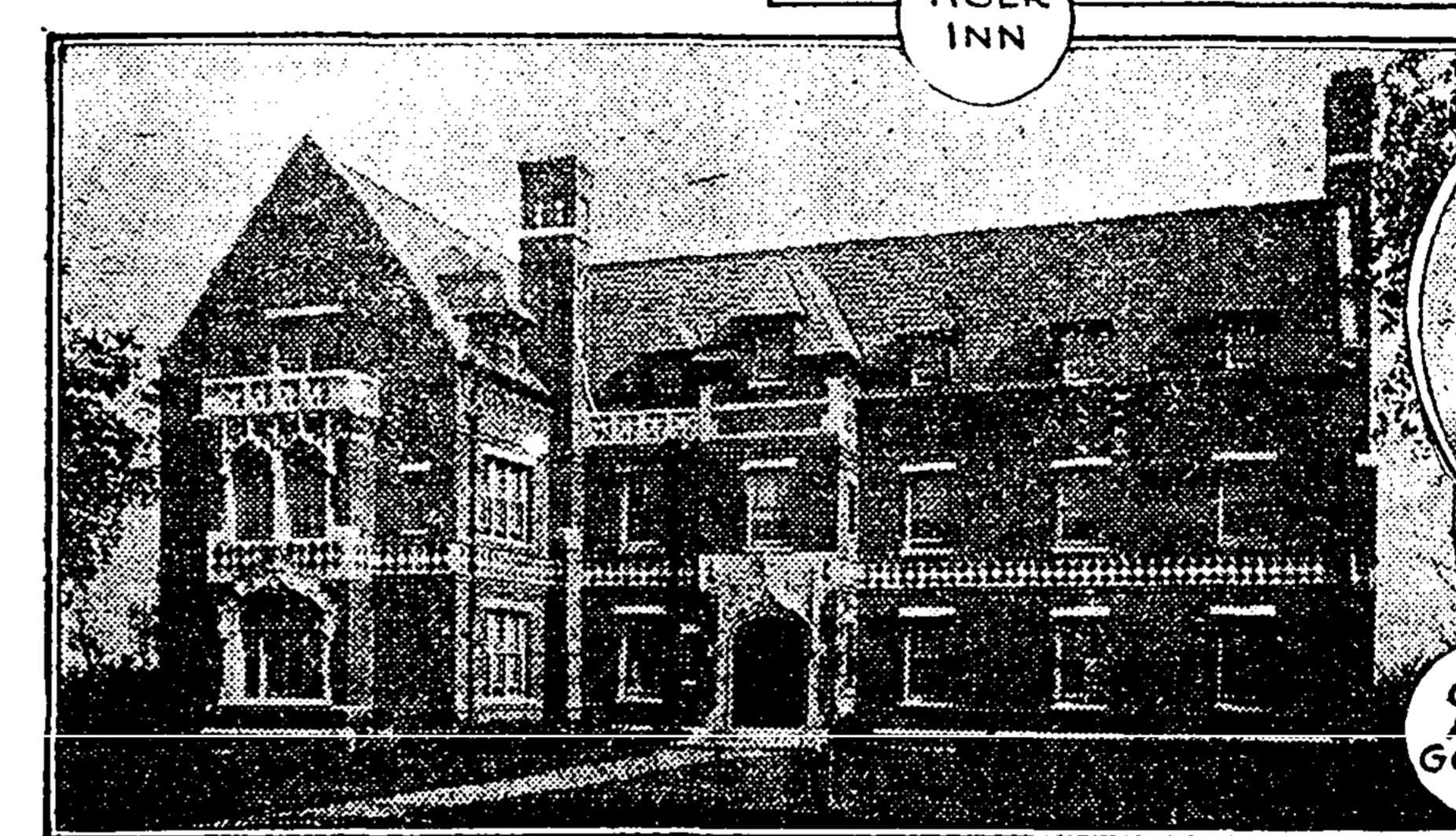
The following is a suggestion made in an open letter by a sophomore:

If some arrangement were made between the clubs so that every member of the sophomore class were assured an invitation to at least one club, there would be no need for "bootlicking" and "keeping up appearances" though there will always be some fellows who do those things as long as they live. They were just "born that way," and it's not quite fair to blame it all on the clubs. Also, if the suggestions printed in one of The Princetonian editorials some time before Christmas concerning arrangements which would allow a clubman to have a certain number of other clubmen as guests during the week without extra expense were adopted, it wouldn't be necessary for a man to break the friendships of his first two years just because he belonged to a different club. If these two steps were taken—every man a clubman, and the social intercourse between the clubs was freer—a man could go around with whom he liked, and there would be no excuse for snobbishness, though you will always find the snob every community.

THREE FAMOUS PRINCETON CLUB HOUSES.



TIGER INN



CAP AND GOWN

COTTAGE

COTTAGE

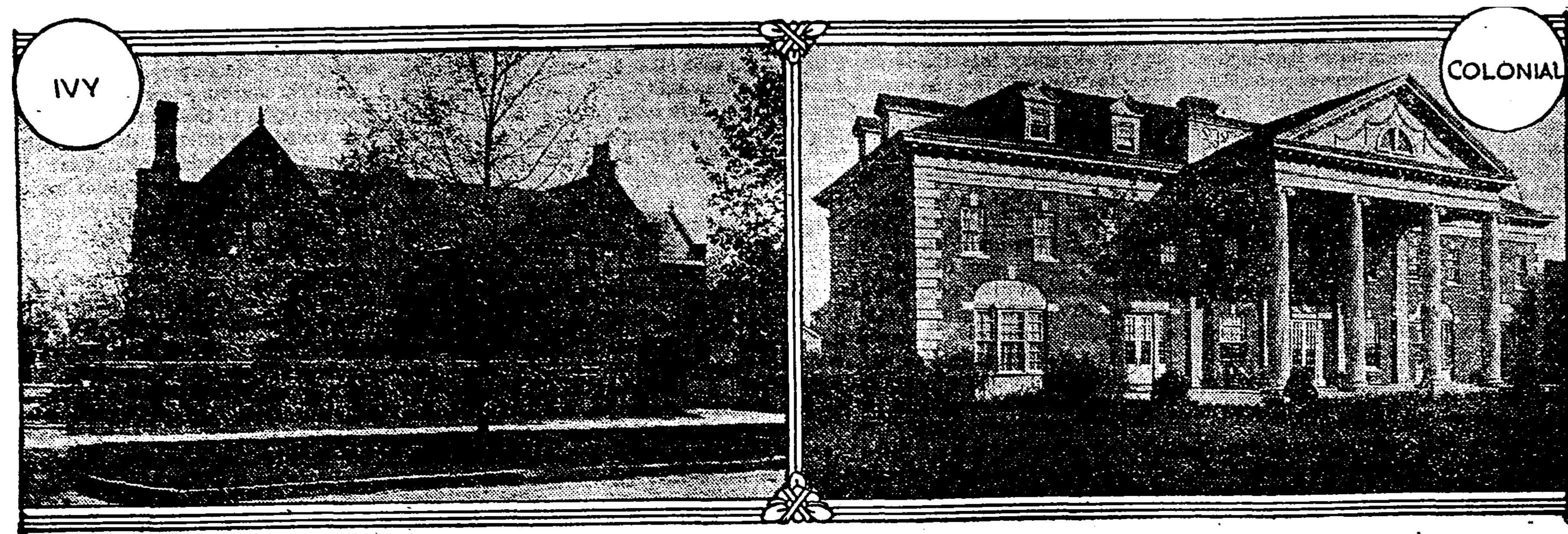


RICHARD CLEVELAND

university having over a thousand students, drawn from all sections of the United States, and a great alumnus body scattered all over the world can be said to have a local interest. If this revolt succeeds, it means an entire readjustment of the conditions upon which the students meet and fraternize. But aside from the theoretical pros and cons of this readjustment, there stands in its way, as a hard, material and unescapable fact, a million dollars' worth of club property—magnificent buildings splendidly equipped—that cannot be "scrapped."

"What are we to do with the buildings

THE HOME OF THE IVY CLUB AND THE COLONIAL CLUB AT PRINCETON.



IVY

COLONIAL