

## CHAPTER LVI

### "ROWBOTTOM"

By George

One of the strange customs of the University dormitories was to stage what the students called a "Yea Rowbottom" party. Tradition had it that early in the history of the University there had been a studious chap by the name of Rowbottom who had a roommate of quite a different nature. Rowbottom's roommate used to spend his evenings in heavy drinking and on his return to the dormitories at his customary hour of midnight, and finding himself unable to climb the flight of stairs to his room, he would call "Yea, Rowbottom!" until the studious Rowbottom would put his books away and help his noisy roommate up the stairs. However, the other occupants of the dormitories, being less charitably inclined than the studious Rowbottom, would open their windows and throw things at Rowbottom's inebriated roommate.

Well, no matter how the custom started, by the time George came to the university it was the established practice for someone coming into the dormitories late at night to yell, "Yea, Rowbottom!" whereupon the students already in their rooms would reply, "Yea, Rowbottom!" open their windows and start throwing things. One of the favorite stunts was to throw electric light bulbs down onto the flag stone walk. This was rather expensive if new bulbs were used, but they made such a splendid noise that it was considered to be worth the cost.

Another strange custom was to stop a street car in front of the dorms by pulling the trolley off the wire. Two of the main surface street car lines in West Philadelphia cross in front of the main entrance to the

dorms. After football games and during special celebrations the custom was to stop a trolley right on this crossing which would tie up cars in both directions and then refuse to let it go on until the conductor climbed on top of the car and made a speech. After which the boys would give the conductor a big cheer and allow traffic to resume.

A combination of these two strange customs led to unexpected results after the Penn-Chicago basket ball game during George's Senior year. Penn won the deciding game and the boys were celebrating at the expense of the street car system in the usual way. Unfortunately there was a new policeman on the job who thought he ought to put a stop to it. When he found that he couldn't make any headway against the celebrating students, the cop got excited, pulled his gun on the crowd and threatened to shoot. Whereupon the boys took his gun away from him and were going to make him get up on the trolley car to make a speech, but he broke away to a police alarm box and sent in a riot call which was answered by a company of mounted police. The mounted police were too much for the students on foot and finally forced the boys back through the gates of the dorms. It looked as though the police had won a complete, if not a distinguished, victory over the students, but some genius produced an armful of Roman candles which they proceeded to shoot at the horses. The horses were frightened and ran away, and the police had to send down a squad on foot.

When the foot reserves arrived and charged into the triangle, there wasn't a student to be seen anywhere. They had all gone quietly to their rooms. Some ill-advised young man stuck his head out of a third-story window and yelled, "Yea, Rowbottom" at the cops down below. Whereupon some other chaps who had not been engaged in the fracas up to that time, but who thought that this was just another "Rowbottom" opened their windows and

began throwing out electric light bulbs. Each one made a terrific noise as it hit the flagstone walk and the cops apparently thought that the boys were shooting at them. At any rate, the officers of the law completely lost their heads and started shooting with their revolvers every time they heard a window being raised. All that saved the situation from being tragic was the fact that the cops were so rattled that they couldn't shoot straight. As it was, no one was wounded, but for weeks afterwards the favorite indoor sport of the students in the dorms was digging bullets out of the wood work.

The only real touches of humor in the situation were furnished by a debater by the name of Murphy and a distinguished member of the faculty of the medical school. Murphy, it seems, had been working in his own room, and to be more comfortable, had put on his pajamas and a bathrobe. When he heard all the racket in the triangle he hurried downstairs and was met at the door of his house by two policemen who arrested him and took him down to the City Hall in the police patrol wagon - pajamas and all! The good doctor had worked very late in his laboratory and in hurrying home, made the mistake of taking a short cut through the dorms. A policeman came up behind him and knocked the doctor unconscious with a crack from his club. When the doctor came to he found himself in a cell in the City Hall jail and was fined \$25 for aiding and abetting in a riot!

But, you may ask, where was George while all this was taking place?

Well, his story is that he was in his room at No. 426 Baldwin in the Little Club, working on his Senior thesis and that he didn't know anything about the riot until his roommate, Herman Hettinger, told him about it. However unlikely that story may sound, at least Grandfather corroborates it to the extent of saying that he was not called upon to bail George out or to pay any \$25 fine.

### Grandfather's Note:

Since someone in a future generation may infer that George's interest was in "Rowbottom", Grandfather will add a note to say that George graduated from the University in the top quarter of his class, that in his Freshman year he played the mandolin in the Instrumental Club, was Captain of the Freshman Debating Team and a member of the Varsity Debating Team.

That year Charles was captain of the Varsity Debating Team, so the family had two representatives on the team at the same time.

The Penn team met Cornell and was compelled to argue in the war against freedom of speech before a Quaker audience with academic judges. While it seemed to Grandfather Penn put up the stronger argument, Cornell won the decision. Next year Charles again led the Pennsylvania team against Cornell; George was too late in getting out of the Army to debate. This year Penn defeated Cornell in an argument on the Railroad question. The following year George led the Pennsylvania Varsity Debate Team against Cornell and won. The debate was on the Mexican question and George's grasp of the question, plus extemporary cleverness in getting Cornell into a bad defensive position, appeared to Grandfather to be the determining factor in favor of Pennsylvania.

George also was president of the Philomathian Debating Society and put on a Shakespearean play for a week. He also took an active part in the Christian Association, leading many delegations in their visits to churches.