DR. ROBERT HENRY THURSTON’S EIGHTEEN YEARS AT CORNELL

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To me has been allotted the pleasant task of giving you some account of the life and work of Dr. Thurston during his eighteen years as director of the Sibley College of Cornell University. To compress into a period of some twenty-five or thirty minutes’ time any adequate account of the activities over a period of eighteen years of a man such as was Dr. Robert Henry Thurston will be, I am sure you will agree, quite out of the question; and I can only hope to give some account of what appear to be the more important features of this story.

The initial point in the sequence of events which led to Dr. Thurston’s call to Cornell appears to have been a gradually growing conviction in the minds of the then president, Dr. Andrew D. White, and members of his board of trustees, that the Sibley College, as representing the School of Mechanic Arts of Cornell, was hardly realizing, in its condition during the middle eighties of the last century, the full measure of its potential standing in the domain of higher technical education.

This is evidenced by the appointment by the trustees, on June 18, 1884, of a special committee known as the “Committee on Revision of Sibley College.” This committee comprised the president of the university, Dr. Andrew D. White, Honorable Hiram Sibley (the founder of Sibley College), the chairman of the Board of Trustees, and one graduate of the Department of Mechanic Arts to be selected by the trustees. The resolution calling for the appointment of this committee prescribed its duty as that of considering “all