

MANHATTANVILLE MARCHES ON!

By the Editors

The recent reunion of the Alumnae of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, which was held on Class Day, May 31, was an important event in the history of the College—certainly one to be long remembered by those who were fortunate enough to have been present on this important occasion. This meeting was destined to mark the closing of a chapter in a controversy which had provoked intense interest amongst the Alumnae throughout the country.

Weeks before, a young Catholic Negro girl had applied for admittance. Her credentials were considered and she was found to have met all the requirements of education, culture, and character. This young lady is the first of her race to apply for admittance at Manhattanville. The faculty and the Board of Trustees, fully aware that a certain amount of criticism would be heard from many quarters, decided to admit the girl, and accept the challenge of prejudice. They were entirely willing to assume all the consequences that might follow from having adhered to Catholic principles. Within a few days, the fact was made known to the students. Eighty-two per cent, by written ballot, signified their approval of this action of the faculty. But after all, this was to be expected, because Catholic Action among the students at Manhattanville had been traditionally marked with high resolve and noteworthy achievement. Five years ago, the Catholic Action groups adopted the now famous "Manhattanville Resolutions," which were extensively publicized in the Catholic press and the Negro press of the country, and marked the beginning of Catholic student interest in the Catholic interracial program. So, naturally, it was to be expected that the decision of the faculty would have the overwhelming support of the student body. However, a rift appeared on the distant hori-

zon. A little group of seven of the Alumnae addressed anonymous letters to the Alumnae throughout the country, criticizing and protesting the action of the faculty. Thereupon, a first-class controversy arose. Although the vast majority of the graduates were in favor of the admission of this young student, nevertheless, the action of the faculty was challenged!

Such was the background familiar to all who attended the Class Day meeting. What explanation would be offered? Would the subject be mentioned at the beginning—or at the close of the session? We are informed that the meeting was fraught with intense expectancy. Soon, the President of the College, the Reverend Mother Dammann, removed every doubt by replying to the challenge of prejudice in a brilliant, cogent and convincing address which held her hearers spellbound. To the objectors who feared that Manhattanville's standards and traditions would be lowered, she replied that the prestige of the College was now higher than ever before, because their Alma Mater had dared to defy prejudice. And so, in turn, each and every other objection was clearly stated and completely answered. The standards of contemporary race prejudice were fearlessly exposed, and the College thereupon challenged the Alumnae and implored them to measure up to the standards of integral Catholicism. Certainly everyone in the audience had a better understanding with regard to the application of immutable Catholic principles: the essential equality of all men in the sight of God; the equal dignity of all, regardless of race; of the identical destiny of all mankind; of the natural and inalienable rights of man, among which is the right of the duly qualified Catholic Negro youth to a Catholic higher education.

We are glad that the controversy arose. It was high

time that the full strength of the force of prejudice should gather in a concentrated attack to challenge a faculty which had decided to admit a Catholic Negro into a Catholic college. At the close of the meeting, the controversy was ended, and the question of Manhattanville's attitude with regard to Interracial Justice now became a settled tradition.

We regret that the limitations of space make it impossible for us to reprint in full this splendid address of the President of the College of the Sacred Heart.

A brief introductory was followed by a frank and forthright discussion of prejudice, and, by way of contrast, this was followed by a comprehensive, philosophical exposition of the Catholic principles, with regard to man, society, race, class, the Christian social order, and the rights and duties with respect to Catholic education. If any had doubted that the faculty had weighed the matter carefully, their doubts were removed by these significant words: "As we pointed out, our prejudices and principles may exist side by side until some call is made upon us which reveals the depth of the one and tests the strength of the other." And, further on, "For some years we have known that the racial problem in Catholic education would have to be met by us not in theory only, but in practice, and we have been educating our students in the principles by which it should be met."

Then the Alumnae learned the reason why this step had been taken. (Again we quote)—"1. There are no scientific facts and no rational principles which support the theory of an innate racial inferiority. 2. There are revealed doctrines on the oneness and equality of the human race which show racial discrimination to be an unjust and therefore an immoral and un-Christian thing. 3. The democratic principles of our Government have found expression in the laws of many

states by which institutions which draw a color line lay themselves open to the loss of their charters. All the first-class Eastern colleges for women admit colored students when properly qualified, with no consequent 'loss of prestige.' Is a Catholic College founded on supernatural principles to refuse? 4. The Pope and the Bishops insist upon Catholic education on all levels for Catholic students. A Catholic colored girl who meets the requirements of a Catholic college and applies for a Catholic education has a right to it and in consequence the college has a duty to give it to her. 5. It is the duty of Catholic colleges to advance Catholic Action under the guidance of the Bishops by training a Catholic Intelligentsia, in the good meaning of this term. However few the colored girls who can meet the requirements of Catholic colleges, each one of them is a potential leader, each one is infinitely precious to God, and each has a right to a Catholic education as strong and as deep as can be given her."

Thereupon, the voice of Manhattanville issued a stirring challenge to the Alumnae, urging them to join the ranks of integral Catholicism in the battle against the forces of race prejudice. "If we are to have our share in this work of helping to bring about the reign of Christ, if 'Thy Kingdom come' is to be more than lip service, then we must sink our own small individual interests in these great ends. What is our little, personal 'social prestige' compared to the aims of God's kingdom! We need unworldliness, vision, greatness of soul if we are to be really effective instruments in His service, and each one who has been educated in the principles I have tried to set out for you today is called by that very fact to rise above prejudices, to be an apostle and 'to do the truth in charity.'"