

UNIVERSITY REFORM IN 1874.

PART I.

THE

PROPOSED COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF DUBLIN.

PART II.

THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS.

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PART I.

THE PROPOSED ACADEMICAL COUNCIL.

There is no more instructive page in the history of the Universities of Great Britain than the debates in both Houses of Parliament in 1854, which issued in the Oxford University Act of that year, especially if they be read in connexion with the agitation which preceded and in the light of the way in which what was then done has since worked. The subsequent debates on the similar Cambridge Bill are of less interest, because the real battle had already been fought out.

In order to form a correct estimate of the scope and significance of the struggle which then obtained its first victory, it is necessary to cast a glance over the position into which history had brought the English Universities. Originally the Universities and the Universities alone taught ; and the number of persons licensed to teach at the Universities was then very great. All the higher degrees gave a license to teach, and the higher degrees were conferred at an age corresponding to our Bachelor's degree. Occasionally some eminent graduate, or some learned man from abroad, was asked to continue his services to the University longer than he would otherwise

have been inclined to do, and was remunerated for doing so. Thus arose the University Professor, who, however, was in no other respect distinguished from the other teachers.

Colleges were in those days one by one established at the Universities by the piety of founders, not to teach, but to house and support some of the teachers and some of the students. But by degrees special instruction was given within some of the Colleges as a supplement to the University instruction, just as in the present century instruction is being given by private grinders who are as yet no part of the recognised teaching staff of the Universities. And in both cases, both in the case of the Colleges in the 16th century and in the case of the grinders at the present day, the unauthorized instruction became the most important instruction given at the Universities.

This was carried so far during Elizabeth's long reign that towards the close of that period a university student who was not a member of a College found a very serious portion of the advantages of the University closed against him ; just as at the present day some of the most important advantages of the University are beyond the reach of a student who does not employ grinders. This was the state of things which prepared the way for the legislation of the following reign, the legislation that is partly embodied in other forms, but principally in what are known as the Laudian Statutes. It was thereby enacted that no student should be admitted to the University who was not also a member of some College, and it was hoped that this would secure that the full advantages of the University should be within

the reach of every member of it. This, it appears to have been expected, would put sufficient pressure upon the Colleges to induce them to open their doors to all the students: it was intended as a reform, and it appears to have been a very important reform for a time. But by degrees other effects, which do not seem to have been anticipated, emerged into notice and gathered strength; until, about the beginning of the present century, when the next reform took place, almost the only teaching at the Universities was that given in the Colleges, and the privileges common to all students had sunk into entire insignificance. Now *this had the very disastrous effect of excluding EVERY student from all the advantages of the University except those connected with his own College.* What made matters worse was the degraded position of some of the Colleges.

Early in the present century the next great reform took place. It consisted in the introduction of University Examinations, which, as years rolled on, have become more prominent and more numerous than at first. They were intended to exercise some control over the Colleges, and improve the education in them, by bringing the Colleges into comparison with one another at the University Examinations. But this improvement has not been unattended with serious mischief, and in Cambridge especially the education of the best students has sunk into a training for the final horse-race by experts in that art. This and other evils are also felt at Oxford, though not with the same intensity, owing to the forethought* of that University.

* See, for example, the controversy between the two Universities, as to the placing of candidates at examinations.

We must then picture to ourselves Cambridge in 1854 with its twenty Colleges, Oxford with its seventeen Colleges and five Halls, but with all the teachers and all the students so penned up within their separate College coops, that the athletic clubs and the University Examinations were almost the only privileges the students had in common. The reformers of 1854 sought to take the first earnest step in stemming this great abuse. They did this by compelling the Colleges in some instances, by enabling them in others, to contribute from their abundance to objects common to the whole University ; by sanctioning some minor arrangements tending in the same direction ; and, above all, by reforming the government of the University.

In 1854 there were two University Bodies* known to the statutes of Oxford and Cambridge.

In Cambridge they were called the *Senatus* and its *Caput*, and in Oxford they were called the Convocation of the University and the Hebdomadal Board. The larger body in both universities was an unwieldy body corresponding to the Parliamentary Electors of the University of Dublin, but incorporated, and with considerable powers. The smaller body consisted of the Heads of Houses, of whom we have only one, our Provost, in the University of Dublin. But practically this inner body corresponded in essential respects to the Board of Trinity College.

Both universities were alive with activity, and a

* I omit, as irrelevant, all notice of the Body known in Oxford as the "House of Congregation," and which is to be carefully distinguished from the "Congregation of the University," which will be spoken of farther on. The House of Congregation is, for the most part, a mere ornamental body, like the Senate of the University of Dublin.

multitude of suggestions poured in from the persons in authority and from other quarters. Nearly all of those which emanated from the existing authorities had to be set aside. Indeed the first proposals from this quarter for the most part served only to betray the unwillingness of their authors to part with power, even when the interests of the institution, to all other apprehensions but their own, seemed imperatively to require it. And in their subsequent proposals, when a change had become inevitable, they showed a jealousy of admitting others liberally to a suitable share, and especially of allowing what Parliament thought their due weight to the private teachers and others not officially connected with the University. I do not think that it can be said that these defects are entirely absent from the proposal which has been laid before the Senate of the University of Dublin.

When the question came to be dealt with in Parliament, Parliament began by creating an intermediate body, intended to represent the whole higher and best-informed intellect of the University. This body was called the Congregation of the University of Oxford, but did not receive any special designation in Cambridge ; and I will therefore use the Oxford nomenclature in the rest of this pamphlet, as being the clearest.

Parliament began by creating Congregation, but unfortunately, after a very earnest debate, the opposition succeeded by a narrow majority in altering the conditions of membership, from those proposed by the Government, into a condition of mere residence.

This has not been found to work well ; and the defects which have developed themselves are those

which were pointed out in the debate, viz., that the best intellect in the University has been diluted and rendered needlessly weak by the presence in this body of a multitude of persons whose occupations lead them to reside in the vicinity of the University, but who have no special intellectual claims for being allowed to govern it. If a similar body is to be created in the University of Dublin, it would be well to avail ourselves of this experience.

It will be convenient here to mention the two other grounds of complaint—for there are only two others—that I have heard frequently urged by English University men against the constitution created in 1854. One is, that this legislation left too much power in the hands of the largest University body—the Convocation. This body is not on ordinary occasions distinguishable from Congregation, and only is in substance different when a whip of the distant members is made on the occasion of some political or religious question being involved in the matter under consideration. Such a whip has been made on a few occasions, and on each occasion I am assured that the result has been discreditable to the University.

It is also said that the condition under which Congregation exercises its large legislative functions, viz. :—that all legislation must come down to it from the Hebdomadal Council—is one that has not proved a useful check, and has caused much inconvenience and loss. Here again we may benefit by the experience of others.

I return now to the action of Parliament. It was

generally agreed that the Hebdomadal Board must cease to exist; and Parliament having created Congregation to be the *corps d'élite* of the University, both gave to it large legislative powers, and intrusted to it the election of the members of the new Hebdomadal Council—the body which was to take the place of the old Hebdomadal Board. It was agreed that the Hebdomadal Council should contain the principal University Officers as *ex-officio* members, and three other sections—Heads of Houses, Professors,* and Members of Convocation. There was also little dispute as to the proportions. In Oxford six of the elected members were to be Heads of Houses, six Professors, and six Members of Convocation. In Cambridge four Heads of Houses, four Professors, and eight other Senators (the Senate being the name of what in Oxford is called Convocation). But a bitter controversy was raised, and several times renewed, as to whether the election should be sectional, after the method now proposed in Dublin, or whether all should be elected by Congregation. No person can I think rise from the perusal of these debates without the conviction that the decision of Parliament was right, when it prescribed that the election should not be “sectional,” but that Congregation should in all cases elect. It is a very grave question whether it is now prudent to set aside this precedent, except on very strong grounds.

The Senate of the University of Dublin is now face to face with the question of reform. It is a very serious question, and if it is to be grappled with it

* This designation includes others than those who have the title of Professor. A list of the officers is given in the Act.

should be met with great earnestness of purpose. The first question to decide is whether it is opportune. The institution has done well under its present Government, in many respects very well; and we all owe a debt of gratitude to the present members of that Governing Body, and to their recent predecessors. But we must also remember that the passage to that Governing Body is a lengthening corridor, which already extends to a third of a century, and which is destined to be still more drawn out in future by the suppression of the Church patronage of the College. These are the facts which compel the Senate to accept the question of reform, now that it has been presented to it. It is forced to form its opinion as to whether the existing form of Government is the most economical and the best that the materials which exist within the University can produce. And if it gives the anticipated decision upon this point, it would be well to define at the very outset, and once for all, the position of the Board. It is folly to imagine that the Board, with its historical prestige, and its time-honoured possession of absolute power, can be pared down into one wheel of a new machinery. The first condition of the problem, which has been set before the Senate, is that the Board must cease to exist; and the only sensible course, on our part, and on their part, is to accept this conclusion from the outset. For it is only thus that the University, in its struggles after something better, will have the advantage of the experience and wisdom of its present Governors, which will otherwise be wasted in prolonging the defence of positions that are untenable.

PART II.

THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS.

If we pass under review the discussions about modern University reform in these countries, we shall find that, viewed from the intellectual side, one of the clearest results arrived at is that the setting of the teachers far more free to choose the subjects they shall teach, and the aspects in which they shall treat them, is the foremost condition required for giving real vitality to a University system of instruction. This can only be accomplished, consistently with the interests of the students, by having a large staff of teachers in the University.

We have seen that in the great English Universities of Oxford and Cambridge there has been a complete departure from their earlier practice. At first the Universities taught, and the Colleges were simply homes for the teachers and for a part of the students. But by degrees the Colleges encroached upon the teaching functions of the University, and after the time of Elizabeth the teaching of the University fell into subordination where it did not wholly disappear.

Thus arose the state of things with which we are all familiar, in which there is a small group of teachers in each College giving instruction to the students of the College, and in doing so travelling in a narrow groove precisely similar to the parallel groove traversed by the corresponding group in every other College. The teachers are numerous, but the power which might have resided in this great staff

is frittered away ; for the tutors are intellectually shackled, since their instructions are of necessity tied down to what the average of their students require.

And the dulness has been increased by what was in other respects the greatest University reform of the first half of the present century—I mean the creating of important University examinations, as distinct from College examinations. Thereupon there sprang up the private tutor or coach, whose whole duty it was to teach whatever would pay in examination ; and, in Cambridge at least, and in reference to the mathematical studies, with which I am best acquainted, all the highest teaching of the University came into the hands of coaches, and all the highest intelligence amongst the students was contaminated by a constant regard, and almost an exclusive regard on the part of the student from the time he entered the University, to what would pay at the great final trial. Meanwhile the proper teaching of the Colleges, which ought to have been healthier, fell for the most part into subordination and dull routine.

The leading men in both Universities are now impressed with these defects, and efforts are being timidly made to remedy them partly by developing anew some of the teaching functions of the University, which are open to all University students, and partly by forming groups of the smaller Colleges. But the real way of dealing with the evil would be to retain and even to enlarge the number of teachers, at the same time constituting them University teachers instead of College tutors, so as to admit all students to their instruction ; and at the same time

to set them almost entirely free to determine with what topics they shall deal and in what aspects they shall treat them. In this way the whole atmosphere would be alive with mind, and yet, with a large choice amongst many teachers, no student would find himself unprovided for. It is thus that a great University is formed.

If we cast our eyes abroad, our thoughts at once turn to the German Universities and the wondrous intellectual force they have developed during the short space of the present century. If we examine them more closely we shall find in them great excellences and great defects. And I think that upon such a scrutiny we shall come to associate almost every excellence with their amazingly numerous staffs and the freedom accorded to their teachers, while we shall attribute their principal defects to the too great freedom amounting to license which is allowed to the student. On this head we have no difficulties to contend against in the British Isles. The British University student is accustomed to submit to a prescribed course, and what we rather want in this respect is judiciously to set him somewhat more free, without setting him entirely loose while he is exposed to temptations to make too narrow a choice. We should commit a grave error if we undervalued the advantage which we in these countries possess, in the more liberal type of our education. But a University ought to encourage further studies also, and what we most of all want is to bring our youth to Universities that are brimful of every intellectual energy. The only possible way of accomplishing this is to set our teachers free, and the only condition

under which the teachers can be relieved of their soporific shackles is to make a large increase of their numbers.

Again, a multitudinous staff brings with it other very great collateral advantages. If a Professor at a German University is engaged on any great scientific or literary labour, it is the practice to exempt him temporarily from his ordinary duties in the University. He returns to them when his special work is done. And this is, I believe, the very best way in which a University can encourage original research—a very important portion of its functions. The numerous sinecure offices in the colleges of the English Universities, which were designed to be of use in this way, seem for the most part to go entirely to waste.

And again, a numerous staff would make the best, indeed, the only provision that is practicable for what is called “the Catholic grievance.” For with such a numerous staff as the University ought to possess, a Roman Catholic student who chooses to do so, would in the ordinary course of events, have an opportunity of limiting his attendance to teachers of his own persuasion. Everyone who has had any real experience of University students knows that their choice, wherever they are left one, is determined by considerations that are very different from denominational; but the mere existence of the opportunity will remove the grievance, such as it is, in the utmost degree that is possible; for the last quarter of the nineteenth century will not listen to the proposition to *exclude* a University student from all instructors except those of one denomination.

At some of the German Universities—the number however is decreasing—an immense staff can be maintained at small cost. This could not be done in Dublin. But the highest intelligence of a nation is its very life-blood, and is worth much ; and if the real pecuniary condition of the great University of Dublin were publicly and widely known, I cannot but think that there would be a strong disposition to add to that small portion of its resources which is available for the direct maintenance of a University staff. Something may be done by economy, something by a judicious system of licensing private teachers, but nothing can be done on a large scale without increasing the emoluments of the University.

Is it known that, exclusive of those of the twenty-four Junior Fellows that are engaged in education (for some of them are otherwise occupied), the University has only two Professors in the Faculty of Theology, two in the Faculty of Law, four in Medicine, and fourteen other Professors, most of whom are so slenderly paid, that they can only devote a fragment of their energies to their academical work ?

Is it known that, to eke out this small staff, Fellows—men of ability who might otherwise have done real service in the University—have been put to teach sometimes a little theology, at other times a little mathematics, sometimes a little metaphysics, and sometimes a little classics ? Is this University instruction ? Surely a very slight improvement of the government of the University would put a stop to such a strangely injudicious practice as this.

Is it known that there are many other small matters to be set right ; as for example, that a very appreciable portion of the working powers of the most efficient Fellows is frittered away in trivial occupations, answering letters about courses of study and suchlike matters, that could be far better dealt with in a University office ?

Is it known that each of the Junior Fellows receives only some £38 a-year and his chambers and commons out of the endowment of the College ? I mean, as Fellows, and exclusive of the offices which some of them enjoy. That their real remuneration consists in their having a monopoly of the bulk of the fees paid for instruction in the University by the students, and that this abuse, for which no one now living is in fault, will one day be found a very difficult matter to dispose of without injustice ?

The total endowment of the University and College may be set down as amounting to something like £35,000, exclusive of its theological endowments, and of the endowments paid over to students. Out of this, the whole cost of the maintenance of a very large establishment must necessarily come. Every porter, every repair, every piece of apparatus, all the multitudinous current expenses have to be paid for. This can scarcely cost less than some £12,000 or £14,000. Add a like sum to this necessary outlay for the expense of our present costly government, and the total under these two items alone will swell to a collateral expenditure of about £28,000, leaving only some such paltry sum as perhaps £7,000 a year for direct application to the more important objects of a University. This is

just the amount that is annually spent upon that sickly plant, the Royal College of Science in Stephen's-green.

But into whatever position we turn the question, the first step seems to be to establish a permanently good government ; for then the defects which we can perceive in an institution that, with all its faults, has done such good work in the country, will become converted into so many grounds of increased hope for the future ; and if anyone entertains but little expectation of good results from reform, let him remember the sudden outburst of the German Universities in the present century ; let him also ponder over what the University of Dublin was as a school of mathematics before Provost Bartholomew Lloyd's energetic intervention, and what it has since become.

