

**SUGGESTIONS FOR AN  
IMPROVEMENT OF THE  
EXAMINATION STATUTE**

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Suggestions for an improvement of the examination statute by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley & Benjamin Jowett

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**ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY & BENJAMIN JOWETT**

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SUGGESTIONS

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OXFORD:

FRANCIS MACPHERSON.

M DCCC XLVIII.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

It is well known that within the last few days a Memorial has been presented to the Board of Heads of Houses, signed by a large proportion of the Tutors of Colleges and Halls, in behalf of a change in the present Examination Statute of the University, and that the Memorial has been taken into consideration.

Under these circumstances it seemed advisable to some of the Memorialists to draw up at length a statement, both of the evils which seemed to them most especially to deserve attention, and also of the remedy which (so far as they could be remedied by an alteration in our present system) seemed most capable of application; not, as will be seen, with any anticipation that the scheme here proposed will be the one actually adopted, but still in the hope that there is nothing presumptuous in suggesting it, with a view to the more effectual consideration and discussion of its details by those who are most competent to do so.

It will of course be understood that none of the Memorialists are responsible for these suggestions except those who have actually drawn them up, or kindly assisted in revising them.

*March 13, 1848.*

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## P R E F A C E .

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As proposed changes in our Academical System seem again likely to occupy public attention, it is hoped that a short statement of what many amongst us know and feel may not be without use at the present time.

I. Let us not be afraid to ask the question as among friends, 'Are we doing enough for the cause of sound and useful learning?' There are no living libraries now-a-days, and this, perhaps, there is no great reason to regret: we do not desire to bring back the student of the sixteenth and seventeenth any more than of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But when we think of the present age, its increasing wants, and the means of satisfying them, of the new methods of investigation which criticism has opened in so many different branches of knowledge, of the sciences which have been absolutely created during the last half century, as, for example, comparative philology, we cannot help asking whether the University answers the call, whether laying aside prejudice and fancy and the spirit of party and every other hindrance, we are earnestly going on our way, dividing amongst us this great field white for the harvest. Many, certainly, see reason to fear that every year we fall behind in our work: that while we are doing little towards embracing physical philosophy within our walls, we are gradually losing that common ground which Scholars and Theologians of all countries have hitherto had; that whereas in the present state of historical and metaphysical enquiries every thing was to be expected from English judgment and patience and perseverance, these elements have scarcely been brought to bear. We are separated from our neighbours by too wide a gulf for us readily to pass; we can neither

accept nor refute them : ours is the criticism and philosophy of the past, theirs of the present.

The uncertainty of opinion, especially evil as it must be in a place of education, is a subject of lamentation to us all. The schools of Divinity have been a shifting scene, to touch upon whose controversies would be out of place here. It may be worth while, however, to ask the question, whether this great uncertainty of opinion among us is not in part traceable to the cause already mentioned, the want of sound learning, founded on special studies, guided by common sense, and free from the bias of peculiar opinions. At present we seem to lie too much at the mercy of any *a priori* speculator in history or theology. Nay at this moment, to use the language of an eminent writer, are we not living 'behind our dykes' in fear of the German Ocean? There may be enemies from whom it is right to fly, but the tide of opinion cannot be escaped in this way.

Every department of Theology demands much from us at the present time. The wants of the last age are not our wants : the enemies we have to resist are different, the foundation to be laid is altogether different. Religious persons often feel that the commentaries for example of the last century are not precisely adapted to their taste and feelings ; that the evidences of Paley and Lardner are not the reasons of their belief, or the answers to their difficulties ; that they cannot throw themselves back into the state for which Hooker wrote, or accept Burnet or Beveridge as conditions of thought. They turn to the Scriptures themselves as a simpler and more profitable study. And can it be truly said that much has been done in this place during the last twenty years for scriptural interpretation, which seems to be the most hopeful mine in Theology, and strangely enough the least explored? It would hardly have been an unreasonable hope that the meaning of Scripture, like that of any other book, might by this time have become fixed and raised above the fancies of sects or individuals. And yet is it not true, that in the accurate explanation of the text we have scarcely advanced in England since the Reformation?

II. To charge these wants upon the University may seem unjust, as they are the wants of our age and country which no change in examination statutes can ever supply. But they point as far as the University is concerned with them to a special defect, with which the University is justly chargeable, the want of a learned body devoted to separate studies. It will be generally admitted that there are no considerable number of persons at Oxford, who, like the Professors in foreign Universities, carry on their distinct lines of reading after the attainment of a degree. There is no encouragement to do so, in most cases no possibility of doing so. We all know the history of Fellows and Tutors of Colleges, at least of a great proportion of them, how they lead for a few years one kind of life, and then for the rest of their days a wholly different one, in which latter learning is almost unimportant, compared with the practical qualities which make a good parochial minister. Why should they lay up a large store of what they want for so short a time? There are, too, men of real learning and eminence, who have had to wander forth into the uncongenial sphere of a country parish, out of sight, out of place, because even amid this dearth of knowledge no home was found for them in the richest University in the world.

III. Are we to turn from all such thoughts and rest only on the educational usefulness of the place, 'It works well, it educates English gentlemen' and the like? There are some who find a satisfaction in a still lower point of view, 'the Universities are the ballast of the country, the drag upon the wheel,' with similar 'unsavoury comparisons.' Can we suppose that this usefulness will be lasting, unless its roots are deeply laid in the careful and thoughtful study, not of three or four years, but of the best part of our lives? Or that in the merely conservative point of view we shall be allowed to remain or deserve to remain even as a 'drag upon the wheel,' while everything else around is changed. Our only defence against attacks from without, is to build up from within, to enlarge our borders that we may increase the number of our friends. We have no one to fear but ourselves. Neither