

**WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?
AN INAUGURAL LECTURE GIVEN
IN THE CONVOCATION HALL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO,
9TH NOVEMBER, 1888**

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W. J. ASHLEY

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With the author's Compliments,

WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

An Inaugural Lecture

GIVEN IN THE CONVOCATION HALL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO,

9TH NOVEMBER, 1888.

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WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

The addition of a new group of studies to the work of a University must always be a measure of questionable expediency. It disturbs, if only for a time, that quiet continuance in well-doing to which a University must owe its strength; it opens the door to endless proposals of innovation; it entails an increased expenditure; and it brings with it the evil of new machinery; above all, of additional examinations. And yet one of the most evident facts in University history, during the last thirty years, is the tendency in this direction.

The most signal examples are those furnished by Philology and by the Physical and Biological Sciences. These have gradually forced their way into a position of equality with the older studies: their victory has been scarcely less complete in the old Universities of Europe with their conservative traditions, than in the New Country where Universities spring up like mushrooms. Now that the controversy is at an end, we can recognise that the change has been the result not of mere love of novelty, but of urgent need. It was because men came within sight of new truth, and of new means of discovering truth, in a way which opened up for them whole continents of possible know-

ledge. Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Classical Scholarship did not become in themselves less valuable ; but other subjects were seen to be valuable of whose existence men had before scarcely dreamed. The *Orbis Veteribus Notus* was not smaller ; but it was no longer the whole world.

"Political Science" is the last new claimant for admission. Already two of the foremost Universities in America, Columbia and Cornell, have created separate courses of instruction under that name, and have each appointed a due staff of teachers. Others, such as Johns Hopkins, Michigan, and Harvard, though they have not adopted the plan of creating a separate department for certain subjects, have given those subjects far greater prominence than before. In France again, one of the most hopeful signs of the times is the success of M. Boutmy's creation, the Free School of Political Science at Paris. Already it has done good work in the preparation of men for the Civil Service ; and in the writings of its director and of M. Sorel, one of its professors, it has produced some of the very best books on modern politics. But it is from Germany that the impulse has come. In its Universities, political studies—historical, economic, administrative, and legal,—have long been pursued with an energy unknown elsewhere. That a separate department has not been created anywhere, except I believe at Tübingen, is due to the elastic character of German University organization, which

for many years we cannot hope to imitate here. But certainly the attention given to these subjects, especially to economics, is increasing rather than diminishing in Germany. Even in England there is a movement in the same direction. The Modern History School at Oxford, the History Tripos at Cambridge, both do something towards fitting men to form an intelligent judgment on the political and economic questions of their own time. I can only speak from personal knowledge of Oxford; but certainly the History School there, though it has to struggle against the prestige of the Classical School, and against a tutorial system which almost stifles research, is growing in importance every year.

There is, then, a pretty general tendency towards the introduction into Universities of certain studies. And a general tendency is probably due to a common cause affecting all the countries where the tendency shews itself. Before, however, we seek for this common cause, there is a preliminary question to be answered—"What, indeed, is Political Science?"

In the first place, I do not think that Universities are likely to understand by Political Science what is called "Sociology." The conception of a science of sociology, which shall arrive at and teach a general theory of "social development, structure, and function," to use the language of Mr. Herbert Spencer, has been of great value. But its value has lain

not in the positive results of professed sociologists, but in the influence of such a conception upon students of history and political economy. It has raised before them the hope that they may be able to make out some sort of rational development in the life of humanity : it has aroused them to a perception of the relatively minor importance of what may be called the dynastic, and picturesque, and anecdotic sides of history : and it has reminded them that all the manifestations of human activity are indissolubly connected with one another. If our history books are no longer "drum and trumpet chronicles," if our economists are no longer content to give exclusive attention to the workings of individual self-interest in the pursuit of wealth, it is due largely to the prophets of sociology. But while we agree with them in thinking that we must try to get our heads above the turmoil of isolated facts, and arrive at generalizations as to the meaning of facts, we cannot but feel the dangers of a too soaring ambition. For the present, and probably for many years to come, it will be wise to limit our view to smaller and more manageable groups of phenomena than the whole experience of the race. We shall be content, for instance, if only we can arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to the stages by which what we understand as the *family* came into being ; or the idea of *property* took the shape it has now ; or, to take an example of a somewhat different order, if we could ascertain whether English history begins with a population of serfs or of

freemen; or if we could get a true and not a rose-coloured view of the conditions of industry which preceded the advent of the factory, and of the changes which that advent produced. When these problems shall have been solved, and a score of others like them, it will then be time enough to seek to formulate laws applicable to the whole history of mankind. Certainly the results at which distinguished sociologists have arrived are not so encouraging that we can venture on making them the basis of our teaching. That "a differentiation of the originally homogeneous mass of units into a co-ordinating part and a co-ordinated part is the indispensable initial step in the growth of a society," which is Mr. Spencer's chosen example to "convey a clear idea of the nature of sociological truth," does not seem to be anything more than the statement in unnecessarily technical terms, that all societies have some sort of government. It does not in the least help us to understand how that government arose, or what has been its nature.

Political Science is something more modest. It is systematic knowledge concerning the state or political society,—concerning its constitution, its functions, the organs by which these functions are discharged, its relation to the individual and to other societies.

It falls into several well defined branches. Take first, Constitutional History and Law. Here we are called upon to examine the manner in which the