

**OXFORD AT THE CROSS ROADS:
A CRITICISM OF THE COURSE
OF LITTERAE HUMANIORES IN
THE UNIVERSITY; PP. 1-130**

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PERCY GARDNER

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*A Criticism of the Course of Litteræ Humaniores
in the University*

BY

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"You will not find your highest capacity in statesmanship,
nor in practical science, nor in art, nor in any other field where
that capacity is most urgently needed for the right service of
life, unless there is a general and vehement spirit of search in
the air."

JOHN MORLEY.

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PREFACE

WHEN a man is about to introduce to his family circle a friend found abroad, he can scarcely fail to look at his own circle in the fresh light shed by sympathy with the new friend's point of view; and he may well discern defects which had before escaped his notice. Perhaps the expected arrival of Rhodes' students may thus affect some teachers at Oxford. But apart from the Rhodes students, there are quite sufficient reasons why we should occasionally examine our ways; and these reasons especially apply to a place where the forces of conservatism, and the power of inertia, are so strong as they are at Oxford.

The changes which have taken place abroad in university studies in the last quarter of a century are enormous. As is shown below, France and America have entirely changed their programmes. And at home we have a rising University of London, at present in nebular shape; a new University of Birmingham; there is the Welsh University; and apparently the Victoria University is about to divide itself. In all these the talk is of new schemes of work and fresh developments. Within the last few years Cambridge has recast her whole course of Classical study. All

this is, of course, no direct reason for changes at Oxford; but it is a perfectly valid reason for making careful enquiry to see whether changes are needed there.

There are reasons which make such an enquiry on my part no mere enterprise, but a matter of immediate and unavoidable duty. Since I was called from the British Museum, fifteen years ago, to take charge of the teaching of Classical Archæology at Oxford, I have made continual efforts to secure to that branch of Humanist study a proper recognition by the University. Under present conditions these efforts have necessarily been in the direction of securing it a reasonable place in the course of *Litteræ Humaniores*. Thrice, in 1890, 1898, and 1900, has a committee of senior members of the Board of *Litteræ Humaniores* reported in favour of giving Classical Archæology a place in the final examination. Thrice has a majority of the Board, consisting largely of its younger members, rejected the report of the committee and vetoed all change.

Personally at Oxford I have met nothing but friendship; and the University has responded in a liberal spirit to my requests for money, so that at present all apparatus for study is at hand. Only in one direction is there set up an impassable barrier, prohibiting students from taking up one of the greatest and most important branches of humanistic study; or making them, if they do take it up, confine their attention to it within unreasonable limits.

Now I am sure that the action of the Board does not proceed from dislike or mistrust of the teachers of

archæology in Oxford. Nor does it proceed from dislike of the subject. The great majority of the undergraduates who have given attention to archæology highly appreciate it: the tutors usually know very little about it, but are not hostile. But they are convinced that the Oxford system, being what it is, leaves no room whatever for the introduction of archæology. It is an element foreign to the existing course of *Litteræ Humaniores*, and its expansive force and energy will prevent it from taking a small place in that course.

The option has thus been set before me, either to consent to the exclusion of Classical Archæology, including even inscriptions, from the course in Humanity at Oxford, or to make a formal and elaborate appeal to the intelligence and conscience of members of the Board, and beyond it to all the University. After long consideration, I have decided on the second alternative.

I would beg Oxford readers to remember that what I am criticizing is a system, a way of regarding things, not individuals. I bring no charge against my colleagues, several of whom are as strongly opposed to the faults of the system as I am myself. On the other hand I am as fully alive as anyone to the fact that in some respects Oxford has stood in the past, and stands now, in a more favourable position as regards Humanist studies than any other university. Only I do not think that she can hold that position much longer, without certain changes in her course.

In making my enquiry I shall proceed, not as an advocate who has a case to support, but as one who is

interested in every side of *Litteræ Humaniores*, in literature, philosophy and history, as well as archaeology, and as one who is thinking for the future of Oxford. If it be really for the good of the University that archaeology should be excluded from the Classical course, the teachers of the subject can reconcile themselves to such exclusion. But it may be that this exclusion is a sign, not of health, but of disease, and if so, it is of the greatest importance to seek out some remedy alike for the symptom and for the malady.

It will, however, be found by those who read further in this book that our enquiry will lead us far and deep. We shall have to consider what are the true claims of humanistic education, even what is the most worthy ideal of education in our universities. Such questions have not been much discussed at Oxford in late years; we have had a time of quiescence, but surely now, when the pulse of the nation has been quickened, and it is beginning consciously to move in a larger orbit, surely now is a time for looking backwards and forwards.

I wish to thank my friend Mr Warde Fowler and my sister Miss Alice Gardner for kind help in dealing with proofs.

PERCY GARDNER.

OXFORD, *January* 1903.