

**THE UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL: ITS
PRESENT STATE**

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The University of Liverpool: Its Present State by Ramsay Muir

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LIVERPOOL

ITS PRESENT STATE

BY

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LIVERPOOL

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The University,

July, 1907.

The University of Liverpool

Its Present State

I. INTRODUCTORY.

IT is not quite four years since the Royal charter was granted which turned Liverpool into the seat of an independent University. It is a little more than twenty-five years since the University College, out of which the University has sprung, opened its doors. This seems, therefore, an appropriate moment at which to review the present state of the institution, and to ask what has been the outcome of twenty-five years of work and of generous support?

It was a heroic enterprise—many thought, and some, perhaps, still think, it was a hopelessly quixotic enterprise—to attempt to plant a great University in a city like Liverpool. The initiators of the enterprise had to anticipate a flood of ridicule and depreciation from captious critics without faith or imagination. They faced all that, and achieved their dream in spite of it. It is not easy to imagine a contrast more impressive than that between the nobly generous men who set out, in face of vast obstacles, to create for their city a University that should be worthy of its greatness, and, on the other hand, those armchair critics who aired their cleverness by cheap sneers and misrepresentations.

It may be worth while, at the outset, to summarise the difficulties which faced (and to some extent still face) the enterprise. In the first place, the English people have not yet learnt that sense of the value and power of knowledge which is the secret of the success of Scotland, Germany, and America. It is only recently that they have been converted to a belief in the value of elementary education for the people at large; the value of high scientific training for those who have to work with their brains—the value of this not only

for the workers themselves, but still more for the community in which they work, the English people had yet to learn when University College was founded. And nowhere was this dangerous scepticism more widespread than in Lancashire. University education had so long been the privilege of the few that it was generally regarded as a luxury proper only for the well-to-do; a graceful ornament, not a necessity for national efficiency. The idea of a type of University like those on which Germany and America are building their greatness, which should seriously set itself to grapple with the problems of modern life, and to provide scientific training for all the new scientific professions which the conditions of modern life have called into being—such an idea had not begun to be widely understood. For the Englishman's notion of a University was solely founded upon Oxford and Cambridge, and because Oxford and Cambridge principally taught the classics and mathematics, it was supposed that these were almost the only subjects which a University could or ought to teach.

Moreover the social prestige of the ancient Universities was so overwhelmingly strong that all the snobbish elements in English society—and how numerous these are!—were likely to laugh at the very idea of sending their sons anywhere else. The founders of the new institution might anticipate that most upper-middle-class parents would prefer to see their sons do without a University education altogether if they could not have the social advantages of Oxford and Cambridge; that they would not for worlds allow their sons to run the risk of contamination by sitting beside the sons of tradesmen or of working men. As for these latter, the habit of expecting their children to begin earning money at an early age was so deeply rooted in this district that few of them could be expected to undergo the very real sacrifice of keeping their sons at unproductive pursuits for three or four years. Thus, for one reason or another, the founders of the new University could not expect to see students in very large numbers flocking to their classes, for the public had first to be educated. Yet from the very first the numbers were

far higher than anybody had a right to expect, which conclusively showed how great was the need.

A further difficulty arose from the fact that secondary education in this district was in an extremely backward condition, so that the majority even of those students who did come were apt to be inadequately prepared. They might be (and often were) men of mature minds and considerable ability. But they had not had a fair chance of obtaining a good school training, and it appeared to be impossible to exact from them at first the standard at entrance which a University ought to impose. The consequence was that the University College had for a number of years to undertake part of the work of a school as well as the work of a University. That has now wholly ceased, but while it lasted it naturally aroused the hostility of those schools which were conducted on a high standard, and with which the College (against its will) appeared to be competing. Many thought that this condition of things showed that the College had been prematurely founded, and that the system of secondary education should first have been perfected. The answer to this was (and is) that one of the causes for the backwardness of secondary education is the absence of a sufficient supply of highly-trained teachers, a defect which can only be met by the institution of Universities.

Finally, any new University must be heavily handicapped by the fact that it has to stand comparison not only with the social prestige, but with the immense resources, of the old Universities—resources which have been accumulated during many centuries. The University and colleges of Oxford enjoy among them an income (roughly estimated) of about £400,000, yet Oxford is complaining, with much justice, of its inadequate endowment. Lord Curzon is appealing for a quarter of a million sterling to meet immediate needs, and the Government has been urged to give to that venerable University a subsidy of £100,000 per annum—a sum, it may be noted, equal to the total

Treasury grant now divided among all the Universities and University Colleges. How could a new-born institution, supported by only a handful of public-spirited men, and coldly regarded even by its own neighbours, hope to compete with that? How could the generosity even of Liverpool merchants hope to rival the millions with which private and public munificence has endowed the Universities of America, or the lavish subsidies with which the State in Germany maintains the institutions which are in that country regarded as the pillars of national greatness?

The easy way of dealing with such difficulties is to fold the hands and say they are impossible of solution, or to wait for other places to undertake the burden and supply our needs. Easier still to mock at all endeavours to tackle the problem, and to leap jeeringly over the rising walls, as Remus leapt over the walls of Rome. But in Liverpool there were men willing to undertake the task. A group of great citizens, with high ideals for their city, have attempted—and, as we hope to show, have achieved—the apparently impossible. In twenty years from the date of their commencement they had raised the College to such a pitch that, in the face of powerful opposition, they were able to convince a strong committee of the Privy Council that their College deserved the name and status of a University. In doing so, they led the way in a momentous new development in English education. They earned for Liverpool the respect and the close attention of educationalists all over the country, as some of the scholars whom they had brought to the city had already made the name of Liverpool familiar among the learned of every country in Europe and America. It is no idle boast that, thanks to this development, Liverpool is now widely regarded as a leader in educational progress. "There are only two places," said a distinguished Oxford scholar the other day, "for which I would leave Oxford. One is London; the other is Liverpool."

But this very wonderful achievement would have been impossible even for the noble group of men who supported

and maintained the University in its early days. It was the fact that the power and wealth of the second city in the kingdom was arrayed in its favour which determined the issue. What decided the Privy Council to grant a charter to the University was not merely the evidence (under searching cross-examination) of the good work which it was doing, but, still more, the unanimous demand of the City Council, which in the action which it then took gave a lead to the cities of England; for, though Liverpool led the way, she stands now by no means alone. The City Council declared that Liverpool needed a University. The City Council pledged itself to ensure that the University should be a worthy one by giving it from the public purse that financial support which was necessary to make up for the lack of ancient endowments. In fulfilment of that pledge the Council has given an annual subsidy of £10,000 to the University, and has been more intimately associated with its control and government than the ruling authority of any city had ever before been associated in the government of a University. And as the City Council is responsible for the existence of the University, it rightly and naturally possesses the fullest powers of criticism and inspection. Not only do five members appointed by the Council sit as members of the University Council and share in the discussion of every step that is taken, but an expert report, drawn up, after full inspection, at the Council's request, has been provided by Sir Thomas Raleigh and the Master of Downing College, Cambridge.

That report is a most cordial and satisfactory appreciation of the work of the University. But as it does not attempt to describe that work in detail, it will be the object of these papers to draw a picture of the University at the moment of its semi-jubilee, the end of the first stage in its development: its students, their numbers, where they come from, what they study, and what they do when they leave; its teachers and their work; its systems of instruction and the extent to which it fulfils the duty of adding to knowledge; its buildings and equipment; its finance; its mode of