

**A FEW REMARKS ON THE
PROPOSED ADMISSION
OF DISSENTERS INTO THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649226726

A few remarks on the proposed admission of dissenters into the University of Oxford by George Moberly

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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GEORGE MOBERLY

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ON THE PROPOSED

ADMISSION OF DISSENTERS

INTO THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE MOBERLY, M.A.

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE.



OXFORD,

J. H. PARKER;

**J. G. AND F. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON.**

1834.

559.

BATKIN, PRINTER, OXFORD.

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FEW REMARKS,

§c.



IT is not more than a very few months since the idea of admitting Dissenters into the University of Oxford was first commonly or extensively entertained. Some persons have indeed objected, and that for a long time past, to the particular test of conformity which is at present required at Matriculation: and some, certainly, have long wished that the barriers of the Church of England should be altogether broken through, and all denominations of professed Christians, or rather all persons of whatever denomination of faith, put upon the same footing in all respects. Still however it is undeniably true, that till within a very short time such opinions were neither common, nor loudly broached. These opinions have now spread most suddenly, and most widely. With that impatience which above all things characterizes the present time, people have no sooner conceived an opinion, than they

are bent upon carrying it into immediate execution ; and no sooner do they set about carrying it into execution, than they stigmatize and hold up to popular abhorrence all those who are more slow in being convinced, as persons who interfere with the march of public improvement, whose motives are probably interested, and whose opposition is the best proof that change is needed.

With respect to the particular design of opening the Universities (or rather of opening Oxford, for Cambridge is already open) to Dissenters, the rapidity with which opinions have been conceived, matured, and are now attempted to be forced into execution, is most surprising. No attempt has been made to ascertain what is the exact system of discipline and instruction which prevails in Oxford. No enquiry has been made as to the opinion of those who, actively employed in administering that system, have certainly good means of judging how far the proposed change is practicable and consistent with it. Those who have themselves been Members of the University assume, that the particular state of things which they remember in their own time, or in their own College, is the state of things *now*, and in all the University. Those who know Oxford only by report, know it generally by the reports of the idleness, the expensiveness, or the dissipation of some of its Members. Accordingly the case of the University seems nearly desperate. Legislators acknowledge no rule but

their own ignorance. They hold, that *we* of the University itself are too much interested to have an unbiassed opinion, or to state it. They think that we ought to be treated as children who do not know what is good for them; whose arguments (if they are allowed to argue) are to be smiled at, and put aside.

The only argument which I ever heard advanced in favour of the admission of Dissenters into the University is this: That the Universities are national establishments for education, and that the Dissenters are a considerable part of the nation.

Now with respect to this point, I have no hesitation in admitting, that the Universities are national establishments in the truest sense of the phrase. Not that they are supported by the public money: for the annual sum paid by the Parliament to certain Professors and Readers in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge is far more than counterbalanced by the sum annually paid to the State by the Universities on account of stamps at Degrees.

But there was undoubtedly a national University established in Oxford for many ages before the time at which Walter de Merton, or William of Durham, or John Balliol, founded the first College. From this time too, till the age of Abp. Laud, the national University was distinct from the private Colleges: the University was governed by general laws and officers: the Colleges were private Corpo-

rations, having their own statutes and governors. In the Chancellorship of Abp. Laud, however, the government of the University was put into the hands of the Governors of the particular Colleges and Halls, by the Caroline Statute of 1631: the right of establishing new Halls, or places of instruction, was expressly reserved to the Chancellor, and thus the constitution of the University underwent a very complete and remarkable change. I am not now concerned to defend the *legality* of this change: though it seems to me, I acknowledge, strange, that any should be found to doubt the legality of a change effected under the sanction of the King in Council, the Chancellor of the University, and the Convocation of the University. But the University did not cease to be national, because the government of it was vested in the Heads of Colleges. On the contrary, the Heads of Colleges, by accepting this government, pledged themselves to continue to receive into their Societies the Students of the national University. Hence the distinction of Members of the foundation, and independent Members. In later times this arrangement was further complicated, and confirmed by the establishment of Exhibitions, or sums (chargeable generally upon landed property) for the maintenance of certain independent Members.

Accordingly, there can, I think, be no doubt, that the Heads of Colleges and Halls are bound to receive independent Members: that they cannot on

any principle shut their gates against the students of the National University any further than by exacting such testimonials, or other proofs of fitness, as shall secure their other members from receiving any mischief from the association, and of raising their own particular Society to a moderate superiority above the average of Colleges. The foundations of the Colleges remain as private as they ever were. Nothing has happened to alter their constitution. The members of them are bound, as much as ever, by the particular Statutes which they have sworn to observe. But they are also bound to receive, according to the usage of the two last centuries, other independent Members, the Students of the National University, only exercising such selection as I have above described.

The Dissenters, then, claim to be admitted into this National Establishment: they do not yet ask that the private foundations shall be opened to them, but they desire to be received within the walls of the Colleges as independent Members. We might perhaps expect, that this modest request, as it appears, would soon be followed by some further demand, even if we had no other ground for such expectation than the natural effect of successful intimidation, and against daily diminishing resistance. But fortunately we have an opportunity of seeing the second step of intrusion exhibited at Cambridge. Those who now admit independent Members will next be summoned to surrender Degrees: the yield-