

**ON GEOLOGY IN
RELATION TO THE
STUDIES OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**

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G E O L O G Y
IN RELATION TO THE
STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF
O X F O R D.

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NOTICE.

The substance of the following *Essay* is taken from the *Introductory Lecture* of a course on *Geology*, delivered in *Michaelmas Term, 1850*, with such alterations as appeared requisite.

ON GEOLOGY, IN RELATION TO THE
STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

It has always appeared to me that there is a great deal of truth in an epigrammatic sentence which I once heard uttered,—that “a well educated man ought to know something of everything and everything of something.” In other words, he ought to have a certain general acquaintance with the principles and outlines of all, or at least of a great many, branches of knowledge, and he ought also to select *some one*, or at most *some few*, subjects of study, of which he should endeavour to obtain the entire mastery. Without the former, most of the ideas which circulate in general literature and general conversation, become to him a dead letter, as unsuggestive as the inscriptions of Assyria or Etruria; without the latter, he possesses no detailed or systematic knowledge to exercise his judicial or discursive powers. Both general and particular knowledge are necessary to complete the mental structure;—the man who *only* knows “something of everything” is superficial, while he who *only* knows “everything of something” is narrow-minded.

So intense in some minds is the appetite for special knowledge, that they waste their energies in striving to master the entire details of every subject that comes before them, forgetting the shortness of life, and the limited powers of the human mind. Of such men it has been said that science is their *forte*, but omniscience is their *foible*. It often demands no little judgment to make a wise selection of special subjects of study, and great self-denial in adhering steadily to them. The particular duties, talents, and tastes of each individual must be consulted. The subjects which have a practical bearing on his social and professional duties must of course have the first claim for his selection. But there are few men who could not, if they would, spare with advantage a portion of their leisure from their daily employments, in order to refresh their minds with some more abstract subject of study, and nothing can more conduce to preserve the *mens sana in corpore sano* than such a change of intellectual occupation.

The principles above stated have been instinctively recognized, with greater or less precision, by the founders of Universities in modern times. They have endeavoured, theoretically at least, to give the chief prominence to those studies which concern all men as members of a Christian and a civilized community, and they have also not forgotten to provide for the acquisition of all or most other accessible branches of knowledge. Their idea of a University, as implied by its very name, was that of a microcosm, or epitome of

universal knowledge, as far as it is attainable by the faculties of man. The entire Cosmos, the *omne scibile* of all external things, was supposed to be concentrated and reflected within our collegiate walls, as the features of a boundless landscape are condensed into the narrow limits of a *camera obscura*. All men were thus enabled to enlarge their minds by acquiring the general principles of every science, while each individual had the means of mastering the profundities of such especial subjects as best suited his tastes and talents.

It is needless to say that no academical body has ever yet thoroughly carried out the details of this theoretical scheme. Yet every institution deserving of the name of University has embodied the idea above explained with greater or less success. Our own Oxford exhibits some deficiencies and some redundancies in her machinery for instruction, but all the most essential parts of the apparatus are established and in working order. The chief thing wanted is a more general appreciation, among our members, of the many pleasurable and invigorating sources of knowledge, both subjective and objective, which the Universe supplies, and of the ample facilities which our University possesses for conducting these streams of knowledge from their fountains in external nature to the mental soil which they are ever ready to irrigate. This place furnishes libraries, museums, professorships and lecture-rooms in abundance ;—the trees are loaded with fruit, but too many of us neglect to gather it.

Although my especial purpose in this Essay is to

point out the claims of GEOLOGY to a conspicuous place among the studies of this University, yet I have no wish to assign to it any greater importance than it really possesses. I fully admit that Moral Science has a higher claim on our attention than Physical Research, but I only maintain the expediency of superadding to our graver studies a general acquaintance with the principles of physical science. Every man who goes forth from our Colleges into the outer world ought to carry with him a certain amount of these general elements of knowledge,—or he cannot be called a thoroughly educated man. And if his personal talents and tastes incline him to plunge deeper into any particular branch of science, to aim at knowing the “everything” of this especial “something,”—let him not lose the golden opportunity which the facilities of this place and the intervals of his academical leisure afford. Many a man, when immersed in after life in the ceaseless bustle of the world, has regretted the hours of unprofitable idleness which he might have devoted to fruitful study in our lecture-rooms and libraries.

The claims of Physical Science as an important part of the studies of Oxford are the more urgent when we consider the great dignity and influence to which it has attained in other places. It is highly inexpedient and even dangerous for us practically to ignore many matters upon which vast masses of able and energetic minds, both British and foreign, are actively employed. Now, if we look around us we shall find that though in

past times metaphysical or mathematical science were almost exclusively pursued, and physical knowledge either misunderstood or repudiated, the present age is doing its best to restore the balance of these sciences. When compared with past ages, the living generation may, to some, appear too exclusively absorbed in physical enquiries, but if this be true of the practical men of our day, it is surely not so in the case of our philosophers. These fully appreciate the excellence of mental, moral, and abstract science, and only differ from the great minds of other days in also allowing a duly adjusted influence to the sciences which treat of external and tangible objects. And as Physical Science is taking its rightful place among its compeers, so are its several subdivisions daily becoming more justly estimated, as they become better understood. By the employment of strict observation and sound Logic, Chemistry has become developed out of Alchemy, and Astronomy out of Astrology. Sciences such as Zoology and Geology, whose names were unknown a century ago, because their practical utility was less obvious than that of some others, are now cultivated and honoured. Flourishing societies are established for their promotion, and authorized teachers for their diffusion, while vast libraries and museums are the fruit and the proofs of the amount of scientific energy which has been thus put in motion. Sciences once despised by the vulgar because they were supposed to be useless and unprofitable, and only pursued by a few self-devoted and earnest truth-seekers, are now heaping