

**THE REORGANIZATION
OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD**

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The Reorganization of the University of Oxford by Goldwin Smith

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BY
GOLDWIN SMITH.

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The Reorganization of the University of Oxford.

I HAVE been for many years engaged, in different capacities, in the reorganization of the University, and have been in constant intercourse with those who took the leading part in the work ; and it has occurred to me that my thoughts upon our present situation, briefly set down, may possibly be of use, if only as an outline of the subject, to some who are now engaged as I have been. My own connection with the University having almost ceased, I may be sure at least of speaking in the general interest, not from any sectional point of view.

I shall assume that, though the promotion of learning and science may be the highest function of the University, its direct function, in the present day, is Education ; and that educational duties ought to be attached to our emoluments. It appears to me that the expenditure of public money in sinecures for the benefit of persons professedly devoted to learning and science has been decisively condemned by experience. What have been the fruits of sinecurism in the case of the Chapters, of the Headships at Oxford, or even at Cambridge where the Heads have been better elected, of the Canonries of Christ Church

unless connected with Professorships? Have they borne any reasonable proportion to the revenues expended? In the instances where a sinecure has been held by a distinguished man, did he become distinguished on his sinecure and by reason of his holding it, or was he distinguished before his appointment to it? Intellectual labour is not so different from all other kinds of labour as to be stimulated by that by which any other kind of labour would be paralysed. The motives which, in fact, impel men to undergo severe intellectual effort, to write books or carry on scientific investigations, are very various and very mixed, being often undistinguishable from the ordinary desire of profit and love of distinction, both of which inducements the system of sinecures removes or greatly enfeebles, and seldom soaring so high as the pure desire of truth, which alone will make a man work hard when his income and his position are secure.

In like manner, the conditions under which, in the present state of society, literary and scientific men arise, are too various to be artificially created with certainty, or anything approaching to certainty, in a given place. Much of the language held on this subject is in truth anachronistic. We are not living in the Middle Ages, when it might be necessary to draw men at any cost out of a half-barbarous population, engrossed by war, unscientific husbandry, or petty trade, to the only place where intellectual pursuits could be carried on. Modern society has a multitude of callings and positions more or less intellectual, more or less favour-

able to the pursuit of literature and science. The high education of all those who are to enter such callings and hold such positions is likely to promote learning and advance science much more than the books occasionally written by the holders of sinecure preferment. It is easy to exaggerate the service done by writing a single book as compared with that done by increasing the general intelligence through the effective discharge of educational duties.

Those who propound schemes of learned and scientific sinecurism generally think it enough to throw out a hint as to the mode in which the representatives of learning and science are to be appointed. But this is the fundamental question. What man or board can be entrusted with the power over national intellect which the exercise of such patronage would confer? So long as an office has fixed duties there is some security for the election of at least a competent person; but in the case of sinecures this check is removed, and the very offices to which the patronage is attached become on that account themselves the objects of cupidity and intrigue, so that the purity of election is vitiated at the source.

If a wrong choice is made, it is not only a negative injustice but a positive discouragement to those who are rejected. Society will not pay twice over for the same thing, either in money or in honour.

These schemes, also, in permanently fixing the relative endowments of the different studies, assume a knowledge of the future requirements of learning and science which we do not in fact possess. Subjects

highly endowed may in course of time be worked out, as seems likely to be the case with classical philology before long: while others may call for increased recognition, which, under so stereotyped a system, they will with difficulty obtain. Thus the course of intellectual effort may be distorted and its progress actually retarded by schemes, which, at the time when they are framed, seem most comprehensive and enlightened.

Experience seems to show that the best way in which the University can promote learning and advance science is by allowing its teachers, and especially the holders of its great Professorial chairs, a liberal margin for private study; by this, by keeping its libraries and scientific apparatus in full efficiency and opening them as liberally as possible, by assisting through its Press in the publication of learned works which an ordinary publisher would not undertake, and by making the best use of its power of conferring literary and scientific honours. The Press, if successfully conducted, might perhaps afford a limited sum in pensions to men who have done unremunerative work for learning and science, which the Delegacy, being officially conversant with the claims of such men, would be a proper body to bestow.

Sinecurism can plead no historical title to the Fellowships. They were given for the support of Students going through the long course of Academical Education which led up to the Doctor's degree. It appears by the College Statutes that the Fellows were expected at the end of their Academical course to take bene-

fices; and I am told by those who are best acquainted with the old College accounts, that the evidence of those accounts is against the supposition that many Fellows ended their days in College.

The University of Oxford was in its earlier days like the Continental Universities, a place of general study, professional as well as liberal, having besides the liberal Faculty of Arts, which formed the foundation of the course, the superior and professional Faculties of Theology, Law, and Medicine. It was open to all comers, who lived where they pleased, subject only to its general discipline, though most of them, it seems, were gathered into Halls, with a graduate at their head. The instruction was carried on in the public schools, and under the public teachers and Moderators of the University. The officers of the University, its Chancellor and Proctors, were elective; and the legislative power was vested in and freely exercised by the Convocation, which, even if non-residents had the right of voting, we may safely pronounce to have been a resident Academic body in the days when strict residence was required up to the time of the Doctor's degree, and when the absence of a post, combined with the difficulty of travelling, would have made it practically impossible to bring up non-residents to vote on any particular question.

In this University, Colleges were founded for the support and stricter government of poor students. These Colleges in course of time increasing in number

and wealth, by a very natural process, absorbed the University, which at last became merely their Federal bond. The Federation retained the examinations, the degrees, the discipline of the streets, and nominally the instruction; but really the instruction passed into the hands of the several Colleges, partly, perhaps, in consequence of the decline of the Scholastic Philosophy, which formed the staple of the old Academical system, and the rise of the Classical studies, which the Colleges took up. Ultimately no one was allowed to be a member of the University without being a member of a College.

The Colleges in thus absorbing the University saddled it with their mediæval statutes, with the local and family preferences which founders had thought themselves at liberty to indulge in the selection of literary almsmen, but which were fatal to the fair bestowal of prizes, or the right selection of tutors; with restrictions on the possession of property suitable only to eleemosynary institutions; with the mediæval rule of celibacy; with clericism, which assumed a new significance when the clergy, from being a great estate embracing all the intellectual callings, became at the Reformation, in the strict sense, a profession, animated by strong professional feelings, and placed in constant antagonism to Dissent; with a mediæval rule of life and a mediæval rule of study, which growing obsolete, and being inevitably cast aside, notwithstanding the oaths taken to observe them, left nothing but sinecurism in their place. The conjoint operation of celibacy, clericism, and sinecurism reduced the educational staff of the