

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1889.

"OXFORD AND ITS PROFESSORS."

A TRENCHANT article in the last number of the *Edinburgh Review* arraigns and passes judgment on the University of "Oxford and its Professors." The evidence clearly establishes the facts that the lectures of the great majority of the Professors are but poorly attended, and that, in spite of the efforts of two Commissions, the relations between the University and the Colleges, regarded as allied educational institutions, are not satisfactory. On the causes of this unhappy state of things we do not desire to dwell, but, although agreeing on many points with the author of the article, we must protest strongly against one of the remedies which he suggests.

"Why," he asks, "should not the Universities recognize the principle of division of labour? . . . Why, for instance, should not Cambridge provide thoroughly for the teaching of natural science; and Oxford as thoroughly for that of theology? . . . Let the Universities abandon individualism and accept individuality. Let one group of allied subjects be studied in Oxford; another at Cambridge."

It is true that the Reviewer thinks that "a University ought to provide a liberal education, competent to form the basis of that technical training which is special to every trade and profession," but he contends that "beyond this general course, the minutely differentiated special studies into which human knowledge is now necessarily distributed must be recognized and ordered."

We are convinced that an attempt of this sort to confine the special studies of each University to particular lines would do infinite harm. It is not only the students, but the teachers, who are benefited by mingling with others who are their intellectual equals, but whose intellectual activities are put forth in other directions.

It is easy to say that London is within an hour and a half of Oxford or Cambridge, and that London society will widen views which might otherwise contract, and prune down eccentricities which might become serious defects. It is not, however, true, and it is not likely to become true, that the average teacher in a University has society of this sort open to him in early life. More and more frequently—to their honour be it said—lads who begin in the elementary school fight their way to University distinction. Others who start from a position of greater social advantage move "at home" in circles in which literary or scientific ability is rare, and in which they are much more likely to be spoiled by indiscriminate admiration than restrained by judicious criticism.

For a large number of young Fellows of Colleges, the High Table and the Common Room furnish, during the most impressionable years of life, the highest intellectual and social society to which they can attain; and many of those who travel beyond these limits extend the bounds of their acquaintance chiefly among those who are interested in the same special studies as themselves.

It would therefore work terrible mischief if the gulf between specialists were widened by driving them into different Universities. Oxford, we may be sure, would fight to the death against being converted into a mere school of theology. It is said that one of its Colleges some years ago refused an endowment of many thousands

which was fettered with the condition that it should benefit only members of a particular Church; and in this temper the suggestions of the Reviewer would be met.

Surely no man who wished well either to the Universities, or to religion, or to science, would desire to see future curates relegated in a body to the Isis, and would-be demonstrators to the Cam; or would mould a Common Room on the pattern of a Clergy House, while a Combination Room was fashioned into a likeness of the Secretarium of the British Association.

Nor do we adopt this view merely on the ground that it is well that students of other branches of knowledge should be leavened by mingling with those who cultivate science. No critic is so unsparing, so useful, and so inoffensive as an intimate friend, and scientific men need criticism as much as others. A hint that, however valuable the scientific results of a treatise may be, they are announced in execrable English, can be conveyed by a college chum better than by anybody else. The Huxley or Tyndall of the future will sometimes be none the worse for the reminder that his predecessors, if they popularized science, did not vulgarize it, and that scientific papers which possibly contain useful additions to knowledge are certainly literature, and, as such, must be tried by the ordinary canons. In short, it is on behalf of the younger scientific men that we claim that those among them who study in our Universities shall not be deprived of the advantage of intimate relations with fellow-students of their own standing, whose aims in life, and modes of thought, are other than theirs.

The argument from economy is sufficiently met by the above considerations, but it is absurd to contend that there is not room for two great schools of science in the Universities, if proper means are taken to fill them.

In every provincial town, Colleges are springing up which are far better equipped than were the Universities themselves some twenty years ago, and the number of their students steadily increases. In Cambridge, the scientific lecture-rooms and laboratories are full to overflowing; and we cannot but believe that, if Oxford is less successful, the comparative failure is due either to temporary causes, or to some defect of organization which could be discovered and remedied.

According to the Reviewer, the relations between the Professoriate and the Colleges are not harmonious, and, if this be so, natural science is probably more injuriously affected than any other branch of study. Centralization, harmful in many cases, is essential in the teaching of a subject which at present attracts a small number of very advanced students, while the machinery for the instruction of elementary students must necessarily be expensive. That it can be attained without trenching on the legitimate privileges of the Colleges is proved by the fact that, in spite of the existence of the Collegiate system, Cambridge has become a great school of science.

SUBJECTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE.

Subjects of Social Welfare. By the Right Hon. Sir Lyon Playfair, K.C.B., M.P., LL.D., Ph.D., F.R.S. (London: Cassell, 1889.)

IN this volume Sir Lyon Playfair has collected a series of his essays, speeches, and lectures, composed or delivered during the last half-century. The volume is