

Speech of John Eric Erichsen ... President of University College, London, at the distribution of prizes in the Faculties of Arts and Laws and of Science, June 30th, 1887.

Contributors

Erichsen, John Eric, 1818-1896.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

[London] : [Printed by Taylor and Francis], [1887]

Persistent URL

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SPEECH OF
JOHN ERIC ERICHSEN, Esq.,
F.R.C.S., LL.D., F.R.S.,

PRESIDENT OF
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,

AT THE

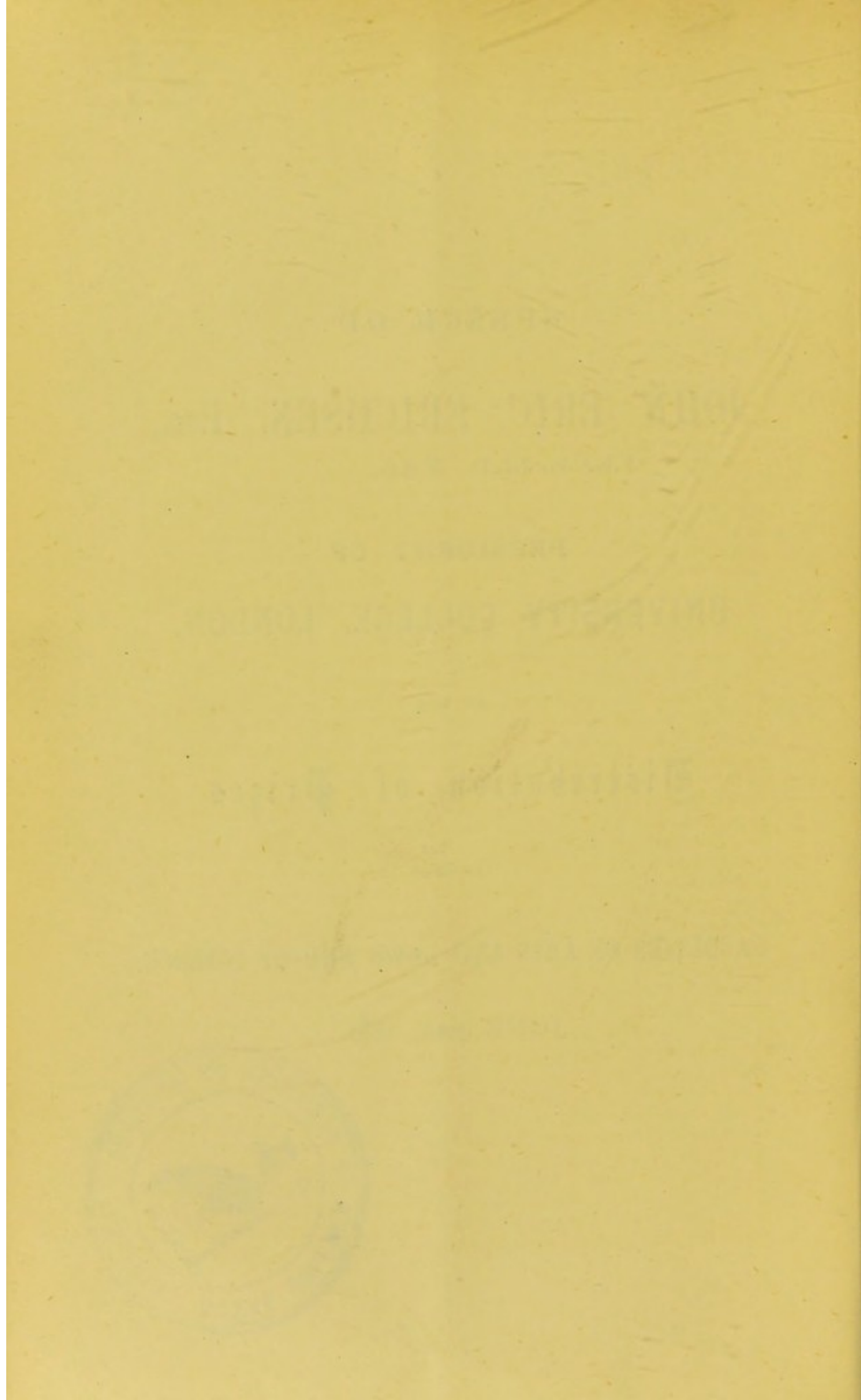
Distribution of Prizes

IN THE

FACULTIES OF ARTS AND LAWS AND OF SCIENCE,

JUNE 30th, 1887.





LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

IN pursuance of the usual custom on these occasions it is the habit of the Chairman of such a meeting as this to make some remarks upon the business that has passed before us; to give some word of advice, perhaps, to the victors in this intellectual strife, and some word of consolation to the vanquished; to remind the victors that the importance of their victory and of the prize that they have obtained, is not in the prize itself, but is in those habits of mind, of thought, and of study, that have led to the successful achievement; to remind the vanquished that perhaps the defeat is, in reality, a blessing in disguise, and that through it he may learn early in life to incur disappointment with fortitude and with resignation.

But on the present occasion I shall not pursue this theme, because I feel that in addressing you for the first time as the President of this great College I may be allowed, even at the risk of being egotistical, to say a few words about myself and also to say something about the College, its present position, and its aspirations in the future.

So far as I personally am concerned, I feel deeply the honour that has been conferred upon me in being nominated by the Council, and being elected by the members of this great institution, as its President; I feel it no slight honour to follow in the wake of such men as Brougham and Grote, Belper and Kimberley. But, great as that honour is, and great as every man elected to such an office must feel that honour to be, he must at least feel that the responsibility connected with it is equally great, and at no period in the history of this College has that responsibility been greater, or is it likely to weigh more heavily upon your President, than at the present moment. I can say this, that so far as the responsibility is concerned I am prepared to meet it; and I can only hope that those feelings of undivided loyalty which I entertain towards this College, and the manner in which I have devoted a great portion of my life to its service, may be guarantees that I shall endeavour to bear that responsibility. And I doubt not in the long run we shall see this College come out renovated, strengthened, and triumphant from the trials that now surround it.

But I feel that my election to the presidential office here constitutes, so to speak, in some sense, though not in a personal sense, an era in the history of this institution; because it is the first time in that history that a man educated within its walls, and who, for a long time, held professional office there, has been elected to that high and distinguished post; and I cannot but feel that that election is due less to any special aptitude that I might possess for the service than to a vindication of

a principle and the assertion of a right. The principle is this—that the government of all great teaching institutions should be in a great measure conducted by those who are, or have been, teachers within those institutions themselves. And the right is this—that the teachers in an institution the success of which is entirely dependent upon the successful discharge of their duties, upon the ability with which they do their work, and upon their general conduct, have a right also to a voice, and a strong voice, in the management of its affairs. It has been said that men of science, men of letters, and men of art, are not men of business, and are unfit to conduct the affairs of a great institution. To that statement I entirely demur. I could point to numerous institutions in this town and in this country that are conducted in the most admirable manner by professional men of all descriptions. I could point to institutions of the greatest magnitude, a magnitude that almost entitles them to rank alongside universities—the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, for example—the business of which is of extreme magnitude, of great importance, very widely spread, and very continuous, and in which that business is conducted with a degree of exactitude that is not to be surpassed in any banking firm or in any house of business in the metropolis, and in which it is conducted to a successful termination year after year by the unaided efforts of professional men. I believe, therefore, that professional men are quite as capable of conducting business matters,—not business matters in the huckstering sense of the Stock Exchange, but business matters in the great sense of the conduct of affairs of great importance—as any other class of men in the community.

You are all aware that a petition is about to be presented to the Crown asking for the incorporation of this College with that College with which it has been for so long associated in a friendly rivalry—King's College—in order to constitute a Teaching and Degree-giving University in the metropolis. The need of such an institution has long been felt in London. It was felt sixty years ago, in 1826, when University College was founded. For the first few years of its existence this institution was known as the London University. It continued up to 1834 as a Teaching University; but in that year a vote was passed in Parliament recommending that the power of granting degrees should be conferred upon it. That privilege or that power was, I believe, never exercised; and in 1837 it was relinquished in favour of the present institution in Burlington House, known as the University of London. For twenty years this College and King's College continued affiliated with that University; but in 1857 the University of London abandoned the system of affiliation and cut the two Colleges adrift. Since then we have had to shift for ourselves.

If the need of such an institution was felt sixty years ago, how much more imperative must it be at the present time? The extension of education throughout the country has been such that the founders of this College could scarcely have contemplated. The establishment of schools of primary education in the metropolis and throughout the country, and the enormous development of secondary schools, have led to a vastly improved system of education amongst a class which, sixty years ago, was almost wholly uneducated. But the education received at primary and at secondary schools is not final. It is not the education which an educationist can possibly be content with. A higher education must be prepared for those who distinguish themselves in

those primary and secondary schools. For the élite, for the cream, as it were, of the pupils in those schools a Teaching University alongside of those schools is necessary, and is the natural supplement and complement of the system of education carried out in them. It is to furnish such a Teaching University as this that our efforts at present are in a great measure directed.

The need, I may say, for a Teaching University in London is so great that it must, sooner or later, and probably very soon, be satisfied. It is scarcely less than a national disgrace to see the greatest metropolis of the world, a metropolis containing within its radius a population of four millions of inhabitants, less provided with educational establishments of a high order than the smallest capitals of Europe, or the newest capitals in the civilized world. From Copenhagen to Tokio there is scarcely a capital in which there is not a teaching and degree-giving university. London is almost the sole exception to this. There is no man so badly situated for the higher education of his children, whether they be boys or girls, as the inhabitant of London of moderate means—the tradesman, the commercial man, the professional man of moderate means. Men with incomes of under £500 a year have no possible chance of giving their children a university education in London. If they take a map of Great Britain and look at it, and make a sort of university chart of it, they will find that there are eight universities in Great Britain. Four of those are in Scotland, north of the Tweed. The distance renders them little available to those who require university instruction near their own homes. So far as England is concerned, there is one up in the north-east corner of England, at Durham, and there is the new one for the midland counties at Manchester. In these cases the distance is equally a bar, independently of other reasons. They are reduced therefore to Oxford and Cambridge, which are the only Universities within reach. But, as we are all aware, the pecuniary resources of the poorer members of the middle classes are utterly insufficient to enable them to send a son to either of those Universities, and it would sound like a cynical joke to advise them to do so :

“Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum.”

We require in London a Teaching University, a university in which all the higher elements of knowledge can be taught, a university complete in all its faculties, and situated, as it were, at the doors, and the instruction of which is within the pecuniary resources, of that large number of earnest students of modest means to whom an intellectual life is the most congenial, but who, for want of a university where they can pursue the higher branches of education, are compelled to relinquish their hopes of distinction in intellectual pursuits, and are constrained to enter the narrower channels of commercial life in order to obtain a livelihood.

Such a university is the one that we propose to establish. It may be said, and it has been said, “What need is there of another university in this metropolis? You have already got the University of London.” I wish to speak with the very greatest respect of the University of London, and I entertain the highest respect for the work that has been done in that great institution during the half century that it has been in existence; and I think that everyone connected with University College must always speak and think of

the University of London with that affection with which a parent looks at his child, the University of London being the outcome of University College. We may sometimes look upon it with that feeling of mixed affection and regret with which we contemplate a child that we think has not always been so grateful as it might have been for the favours received in its early life. But, however that may be, we all speak of the University of London with, and we all feel towards it, the greatest respect and a certain affection.

But the University of London is, in truth, not a university in any sense of the term. The title is misleading and is a misnomer. By a "university" is meant an association of teachers and of students, properly organized, destined for the increase and the transmission of all learning, of knowledge in all its branches, and containing complete faculties of Arts and Laws, Science and Medicine, and empowered to grant degrees to those of its pupils who are found to be sufficiently qualified for such a distinction. The University of London never has pretended to be a teaching institution, and, so far as its present constitution is concerned, never can be a teaching institution. If it were to become a teaching university it would require to be so completely altered in its constitution as practically to become a new institution. The University of London has only performed one of the functions of a university—that of examining candidates for its degrees. It has performed that function admirably well. The examinations have been carried to a very high standard, so much so that the ordinary pass-examination in some subjects is almost an honours examination. Yet it is only a degree-giving institution, and not a university in the sense in which a university is generally known.

Nor is it "of London;" for, as was truly said by the Dean of the Faculty of Science in that admirable report that we listened to at the commencement of these proceedings, it is an imperial university, which draws its candidates from almost every part of the habitable world. It has nothing to do with London except that its head-quarters are situated in Burlington House; but, so far as London is concerned, it might just as well be situated anywhere else. The University of London, then, does not, in any way, supply the want that we wish to fill. With regard to London itself, I may say this, that even as an examining institution the University of London does not supply the desire that has sprung up of late years for academic distinctions. It does not supply the desire amongst the inhabitants of London itself. I can speak of my own profession. Of late years there has been a craving in the medical profession for the possession of degrees. As Sir George Young stated very truly in distributing the prizes in the Medical Faculty about a month ago, if there were no degrees at all we should be none the worse for it; but one may also state something like the converse of that proposition, that if everybody has got a degree, nobody is a bit the better for it, and what is common to all can be an honour to none. However, that there exists a great desire for degrees and for academic distinctions there can be no doubt. Well, do the students of the medical schools in London go to the University of London for those degrees? Not at all. They go elsewhere. They go to Edinburgh; they go to Cambridge; they go to Oxford. At the present moment there are about nineteen hundred medical students at the University of Edinburgh, and nearly seven hundred of them are English. They are attracted there not so much by the superiority of

teaching, because—and I say it with all respect to the University of Edinburgh, to which I have reason to be very grateful—the teaching, high as it is, and excellent as it is in all its departments, is not better than the teaching in four or five of the principal medical schools in London; but the students go there simply in order to obtain a degree, because at the end of their studies, instead of coming out as simple Mr. So-and-So, they come out as Dr. So-and-So. Well, the others who do not go to Edinburgh, go to Cambridge or go to Oxford; and there is a very large medical school now at Cambridge also, frequented by young men who are desirous of obtaining the degree of that distinguished university. The following incident will show how little the University of London supplies the need for degrees which is felt by London medical men. A few weeks ago there was a vacancy at one of the large hospitals of London for an assistant physician. There were no less than twelve or fourteen candidates. They were all graduates of British universities, and out of this large number of candidates, all London men, educated more or less in London, and practising in London, and attending hospitals in London, there was only one candidate who was a graduate of the University of London. All the others were graduates either of Oxford or of Cambridge. I say, therefore, that men go away from London to get their degrees at the present day. They go to Edinburgh, they go to Oxford, they go to Cambridge, they go elsewhere; but the vast majority do not go to the University of London. That, as a degree-giving institution, does not supply the needs of London itself.

The proposed establishment of this new teaching and degree-giving university has been termed an act of hostility, a kind of declaration of war, against the University of London. Now I can say truly, speaking in the name of my fellow-members of the Council here, that there is no such feeling whatever. No such feeling has animated, I believe, any one of the Council or any person connected with this Institution. This proposed university will compete, probably, to a certain extent, with the University of London, but it will compete much more with other universities. It will compete much more with the University of Edinburgh; it will compete much more with the University of Cambridge. There is no direct competition intended with regard to the University of London. There is no reason why a new university should not be established. There is no more reason to complain of competition in the establishment of a new university than there is in the establishment of a new school. Every new school competes with every other school in existence. There is no more reason to complain of it than to complain of the introduction of a new member into any of the learned professions. Every man who becomes a lawyer or becomes a doctor may be said to compete with every existing lawyer or doctor. In the same sense the new university, if established, might be said to compete, more or less, with every existing university in the kingdom. In this case there is a competition of friendly rivalry, but nothing else; and beyond that I cannot admit that there is any special competition with regard to any existing university.

If the University of London does not supply the want felt for higher education, how is that want to be supplied in London? There are only one or two methods. You must either take existing institutions, or you must create a *tertium quid*, and what that *tertium quid* may be I know not. But what existing institutions are we do know, and we do

know that there are two institutions in this metropolis which for the last half-century have been doing the only work in London that approaches to the higher education, or approaches in any way whatever to university education. They have done that work diligently and well under great difficulties and great disadvantages, but with a fair share of success. I mean this College and King's College. Those are the two institutions; and by the combination of those two institutions we may fairly look for the establishment of a new university in London fully capable of discharging the functions of such an institution.

I happen, from circumstances, to be personally acquainted with, I believe, every university in the kingdom; and I can say that so far as the equipment of universities is concerned in the way of museums, laboratories, libraries, lecture-rooms, and all other appliances—what may be termed the “plant” of a university—these two institutions taken singly are equal to most; this one certainly is, and taken in conjunction they are superior to almost all, except the old universities of Oxford and of Cambridge. I put them aside; but these institutions, University College and King's College, taken in conjunction, are fully equal in all the requirements of a university to the other universities in Great Britain, the Scottish universities and the two universities of this country—one in the north and the other in the midland counties.

I cannot speak with any precision of detail of King's College, but I can speak with precision of this College; and it may be interesting to you to know what this College really is, and what it can present to the public in the way of supplying the requirements of a great teaching institution of university rank.

This College, in the first place, has complete Faculties of Arts, Laws, Science, and Medicine, and a School of Fine Arts, as well as a Boys' School. This College has fifty-eight professorial chairs in operation. In addition to the fifty-eight professors, there is a large teaching staff both on the general and on the medical side,—teachers, lecturers, demonstrators, and so on,—bringing up the whole members of the teaching staff to something like one hundred. Last session this College had between nineteen hundred and two thousand students. There were five hundred and fifty boys in the school. The buildings of this College, containing, as I have said, Museums, Libraries, Lecture-halls, Laboratories, and all the appliances of a university, are spread over seven acres. They cost £300,000 in construction. This College holds on trust no less a sum than £200,000, chiefly devoted to prizes, scholarships, and other objects of that kind; and it holds, besides, in trust, a sum of £135,000 for hospital purposes. Its income is between £33,000 and £34,000 a year. Taking, therefore, this College alone, so far as its buildings, the contents of its buildings, and its pecuniary resources are concerned, it stands on an equal footing with several of the universities in Great Britain; and, taken in conjunction with King's College, it stands undoubtedly superior to some.

To this College, therefore, in combination with King's College, we may fairly look to the attainment of our object of establishing a Teaching University in London which will bring the higher education of London to the doors and within the pecuniary resources of the less wealthy classes of the metropolis, so that the disgrace that has hitherto attached to the metropolis of not affording a higher education, and the discredit that university education in England is to a very great extent a privilege of the wealthier and of the well-to-do classes, may

be wiped away. It should be within the reach of all, even of the student of the most humble means; and it would be well if this country were to take the example of Scotland in that respect and to follow it.

That "*perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*," with which we are all so well acquainted, is undoubtedly not of race. There is no special difference between the lowland Scot and the northern English; but it is due to the culture to which the Scottish mind has been subjected during the last three hundred years. Since John Knox established, three hundred years ago, his system of parochial education in Scotland, and since the Edinburgh University and the University of Saint Andrews (one of which celebrated its tercentenary a few years ago) established there the system of education, they have given their advantages to all classes of the community, and the light of education burnt brightly amongst the people of Scotland, while all was Cimmerian darkness amongst the same classes on the other side of the Tweed. There is no doubt that the result of that education has tended greatly to develop the Scottish intellect and the Scottish mind, and to make it in all respects, so far at all events as culture and the appreciation of culture are concerned, far in advance of that of the English of the corresponding class.

There are two points, and two points only, about which I would say a few words before I conclude. I shall not trespass much longer upon your patience. In this new Teaching University there are two requirements that we insist upon. One is that the candidates for its degrees should have spent a certain specified time in attendance on lectures and instruction within its walls; and the other is that the examinations should be superintended and conducted by the teaching body of the university.

With regard to the first of these two points, I wish to say a few words. There are two methods, as you are all aware, of acquiring knowledge—one by solitary study, the other by academic or collegiate instruction and study. Knowledge may be acquired, and perhaps to the same extent, by both; but the kind of knowledge which is acquired is, I take it, very different. The man who acquires his knowledge by solitary study, carries his knowledge about with him as in a box outside him, very possibly amply stored and well provided, ready to be produced when occasion requires, but not as a part of his nature. The man who acquires his knowledge under academic and collegiate influences, becomes imbued with that knowledge in a way that cannot be attained in the course of solitary study. The spirit of his teacher penetrates into him, and he receives something of the Promethean fire of learning, of knowledge, and of culture from the man who communicates the learning and the knowledge and the culture to him. There is the same difference between the knowledge that is obtained under academic or collegiate influences and that which is obtained by solitary study, that there is in the information that is obtained in listening to a speech delivered by a great orator, and reading the speech in the columns of the daily papers the next day.

If you listen to the fervid oratory of a Gladstone, or the incisive eloquence of a Randolph Churchill, you acquire something more than the mere words, and you carry away with you something very different from that which is obtained by the man who reads their speeches as reported the following morning in the daily papers. He can give you

all the arguments and all the facts that have been stated; but he lacks the spirit which would have been infused into him by immediate contact, as it were, with the mind of the orator. And so it is in academic instruction. The pupil carries away with him something that is communicated to him directly by the fervour, by the energy, and by the desire to impart instruction on the part of his teacher.

But there is also something more than mere knowledge that is acquired in academic instruction. There is a culture of mind and a development of the moral and social nature that cannot be acquired by solitary study; and it is for these reasons amongst others that those who are in favour of this movement are desirous that the candidates for the degrees of the new University should prosecute a portion, at all events, of their studies within the walls of the institution, so that they may imbibe something of the spirit, and that they may be in some way, too, impregnated by the *genius loci*. This has been stigmatized as retrograde; but surely there can be nothing retrograde in that which has been found by universal experience to be the better system of education, and which is adopted in every teaching university in the country.

There is another point, and that is in regard to examinations, and it is a very essential point. We feel, and we feel very strongly indeed, that the examinations should not be directed by an outside body on which there are perhaps no examiners and no teachers, but that the examinations should be conducted by the teachers themselves in the institution in which the candidate learns. I do not say by the individual teacher of each class, but by the general body of the teachers, and that is a very different thing. And, as there would be more Colleges than one in the new teaching university, a candidate need not in any way be examined by his own teacher, although he would be examined under the direction, superintendence, and control of the general body of the teachers. In every university now, I believe, throughout the Kingdom the teachers are assisted in their examination by assessors or by extra-professorial aid, whenever it is needed, and such, of course, would be the case in the new university. We feel that examinations ought not to lead teaching, and that if examinations are allowed to lead teaching, the teaching is fettered by the examination, and you get to a system of "cram;" the higher education and the higher teaching are apt to be neglected. I recollect many years ago a circumstance illustrating this, occurring in this College in connection with Professor Sharpey, one of the most distinguished men ever connected with this College, the first Professor of Physiology here and, indeed, in London. There was no course, properly speaking, of Physiology given in London until Professor Sharpey began his lectures here in the year 1836-37. Professor Sharpey gave an elaborate course of Physiology. From the commencement he attracted crowds of students. At that time there was connected with this College a most estimable and most amiable and most excellent old surgeon, who had grown grey within the walls, as it were, of the unreformed College of Surgeons, Mr. Samuel Cooper. He was an examiner of the College of Surgeons, and I speak of him with the greatest respect; but he was never able to raise his mind beyond the requirements of the examinations of that institution. When he heard of what Professor Sharpey was doing, he said, "What is the good of Sharpey teaching them all this kind of stuff? We do not

want it at the College of Surgeons. We have never asked for it at the College of Surgeons. Why should he teach it to them?" He had no conception beyond that, and that is the frame of mind that affects every mere examiner. He has a tendency to fetter and tie down the teaching to the level of his own examinations, and it is impossible to bring him or an examining institution above that level. We therefore wish that the instruction should lead the examination, and that the examination should follow in the wake of the teaching, and not the teaching in the wake of the examination.

The teacher is certainly superior to the examiner, and it is not for him to be dictated to as to the extent or degree to which he is to carry his teaching, by any examiner or examining board.

I must apologise, Ladies and Gentlemen, for having at so late an hour of the day detained you so long upon this subject. But the matters which I have touched upon are of no little importance, and are of great interest to those who have at heart, not only the development of the higher education of the people of this metropolis, but the future advancement of University College; and I commend most sincerely to all those who are true friends and supporters of this great Institution to have no divided loyalty, but to stand by it in this crisis and to use their best endeavours to carry the conjoined University and King's Colleges through that crisis triumphantly, as constituting together the great teaching and degree-giving University of London.

On the Motion of Professor Williamson, seconded by Sir George Young, a vote of thanks was unanimously accorded to Mr. Erichsen for his address.

