

Oxford and working-class education / by J.B. Rye.

Contributors

Rye, James Bacon, 1871-
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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OXFORD
AND
WORKING-CLASS
EDUCATION.

BY

J. B. RYE, M.A.,

FORMERLY SCHOLAR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE,
OXFORD.

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"I foresee an entire revolution in our educational system coming from the discovery that success in it does not mean success in life . . . The British public is slow, but it finds out when an article does not pay. The higher education is ceasing to pay."

(Mandell Creighton, D.D., Bishop of London).

"Governing is not a very difficult art; it requires much less technical skill and training than engineering or medicine. This can be observed by watching . . . a cricket eleven out fielding."

(A. E. Zimmern, Fellow and Tutor of New College).

"I desire a system in which it will be clearly understood, and effectively brought about that, persons who do not *at once* show that they come to the University because they want to be students will have to go elsewhere."

(Charles Gore, Hon. D.C.L., Bishop of Birmingham).



THE reform of Oxford University and the Oxford Colleges has at last entered the realm of Practical Politics. Actuated by a generous desire to cure the admitted evils of Society, the Bishop of Birmingham and, apparently, the effective rulers of the University, have decided that our *Alma Mater* should take a conspicuous part in the higher education of the poorer members of the Working-classes.

A Joint Committee of University and Working-class representatives have just issued a report on "Oxford and Working-class Education." This report has been published by the Clarendon Press, and one of the recommendations of the Joint Committee has been already approved by Convocation, the sovereign body in the University. If Convocation and the College authorities submitted to the rest of the changes advocated by the Joint Committee, Oxford would not be reformed but revolutionized. The reader can, however, judge for himself. Below are a few of the conclusions arrived at by—

The Dean of Christ Church,
Two Fellows of New College,
A Fellow and Tutor of Balliol College,
A Fellow and Tutor of St. John's College,
The Secretary to the Delegates for the Extension of University Teaching,
The Chairman of the Executive Committee of Ruskin College,
Mr. C. W. Bowerman, M.P.,
Mr. D. J. Shackleton, M.P.,
Mr. W. H. Berry,
Mr. R. Campbell,
Mr. A. Mansbridge.
Mr. J. M. Mactavish, and
Mr. A. Wilkinson.

The Dons, I may observe, were appointed by the Vice-Chancellor; among their number were two or three pronounced Socialists. It is noticeable that there is no Minority Report.

(1.) It is not, say the authors of the Report, the mere association of individuals that gives Universities of the English type their special character—it is their association in the pursuit of knowledge (p. 11).

(2.) The expenditure of the University and Colleges, in 1907, exceeded the receipts from Endowments by £177,217 10s. 9½d. This deficit was covered by the sums collected from graduate and undergraduate members of the University and Colleges (p. 30).

(3.) The Officers, Professors, Readers, Examiners, Heads and Fellows, College Expenditure on University purposes in 1907 absorbed—

£157,350 3s. 9d.;

College Tuition absorbed—

£62,653 16s. 3d.;

College Scholars and Exhibitioners absorbed—

£52,890 15s. 10½d.

(p. 31).

(4.) The direction of University teaching, in as far as it relates to the working classes, should be in the hands of a committee consisting of an equal number of workpeople and University representatives. But we attach great importance to the principle of direct representation, and we desire to see it extended for the following reasons: (a) The presence of leading members of working-class organizations is invaluable on account of the personal contributions of knowledge and suggestion which they can offer. This report is a striking example of our statement. (b) It secures the confidence and co-operation of large bodies of men who might otherwise be inclined to distrust Oxford. (c) It gives workmen a very valuable insight into the working of University institutions—a knowledge which, through them, may be widely diffused throughout the nation (p. 54).

(5.) Our first proposal is that in certain selected industrial towns classes should be established, of not more than thirty students; that these classes should pursue a plan of study drawn up by workpeople and representatives of the University in consultation; that Oxford should appoint and pay half the salary of the teachers by whom such classes are taught; and that such teachers should receive a status as a lecturer in Oxford, appointed either by a college or by the University (p. 56).

(6.) We have no fear at all that were the classes placed, as we recommend, under the direct control of workpeople, in co-operation with University men, they would be used for any but the highest educational ends (p. 58).

(7.) While the management and organization of the class should be mainly in the hands of workpeople, the selection of curricula and guidance in reading must be the duty of the University acting in co-operation with workpeople (p. 59).

(8.) As a rule, teachers of the new classes should be selected from among those who have had previous experience of teaching workpeople either at Ruskin College, or at Social Settlements, or in connexion with the Workers' Educational Association, or in some other way, and should satisfy the standing committee that they possess the desired qualifications (p. 65).

(9.) By being required as part of his duties to teach regularly in Oxford, the teacher would be saved to a considerable extent from dropping into slipshod and unacademic habits of thought and expression (p. 66).

(10.) If University Extension work is accompanied by a recognized status in Oxford itself, the teachers employed will have far better prospects of obtaining Professorial Chairs and other posts of dignity and emolument, with the result that the ablest men will tend to offer themselves for the work.

The presence in Oxford of the teachers of the tutorial classes will give undergraduates an opportunity of obtaining a knowledge of industrial conditions, which it is much to be desired they should possess (p. 67).

(11.) There is to be established in Oxford a Diploma course in Political Science (pp. 68-9).

(12.) We recommend that, on the conclusion of the period of two years' study undertaken by any extra-mural class, a special committee of selection be appointed, consisting of the class teacher, two University representatives, a representative of the Workers' Educational Association, of the local organization, and of the class, to select those students whom they consider ought to be enabled to come into residence at the University (p. 71).

(13.) It is hardly necessary to point out that no workman can, out of his own earnings, provide anything approaching £52 a year, and that such money as he has laid by must be used not to pay for his residence in Oxford, but to support him during the period after leaving Oxford in which he is likely to be looking for employment. Moreover, if he is married, his family has to be considered. In abandoning his trade for two years, and consequently losing his wages and breaking his service, he will make, in any case, a very considerable financial sacrifice. It will be necessary, therefore, if the freedom of access to Oxford which is generally thought desirable is to be a real and not merely a nominal freedom, to find the means of maintaining him at the University (pp. 72-3).

(14.) It appears to us, in view of the urgent importance of bringing the working classes into touch with Oxford, that it would not be unreasonable to ask the colleges to devote part of the funds which they spend on scholarships and exhibitions to the maintenance of the students from the Tutorial classes, when the latter have been established (p. 73).

(15.) The scholars may come up either as members of an ordinary college, or as non-collegiate students, or as members of Ruskin College, according to the tastes of each individual and the advice given to him. But we think it important to point out that the fullest facilities should be offered for the admission into ordinary colleges of any approved person who desires it. The life of the non-collegiate student, in spite of the great educational advantages which it offers at a very small cost, would not be that most adapted to the education of workpeople, because it would tend to cut them off from the opportunity of mixing with many different types of character and social tradition, which is generally admitted to be one of the most valuable elements in an Oxford education (p. 76).

(16.) *We have seen no reason at all*¹ for agreeing with the suggestion occasionally made that workmen students would not mix well with men drawn from the 'public' schools, or that they would introduce a discordant element into college life. Though it is hard for a poor man to enter a college, he finds in it, once he has entered, a spirit of fellowship and equality, and if we may be permitted to express our opinion on a matter on which certainty is impossible, it seems to us that they would make very valuable contributions to the social life of Oxford, and that they would teach other undergraduates at least as much as they would learn from them. For this reason, if for no other, we would wish that a large number of them could reside regularly in Oxford colleges (p. 77).

(17.) Finally, we think it desirable that the working-class students in residence in different Colleges should as far as possible reside together during the vacation, and we recommend that facilities be offered them by one of the colleges for obtaining rooms in it at any rate during July, August and September (p. 81).

(18.) Some of the students educated at Oxford will naturally become teachers of the tutorial classes organized under the new Standing Com-

¹ The italics are mine.

mittee of the University Extension Delegacy. This would, in our opinion, be a most important and desirable development (p. 84).

(19.) A career must be opened to talent. There must be that free movement from one class to another that alone can ensure that the manual and intellectual work of the nation is performed by those best fitted to perform it, and that fresh streams of ability are continually drawn from every quarter of society. There must be more scholarships from the elementary to the secondary schools, and from public secondary schools to the University. A larger number of Oxford scholarships must be reserved for poor men, and must be given in subjects such as history and modern languages, in order that the youth educated at schools where classics predominate may not have an unfair advantage over the boy from schools where the future of most of the students causes classics to be crowded out by other subjects. The expenses of a University education must be reduced to a minimum by action on the part of the University, and if necessary by grants from public sources, and a far larger number of those who are destined to teach the rising generation must receive the broad mental culture which Universities can give. By these and similar steps the movement of the sons of poor parents into the intellectual professions would be facilitated, and Oxford would be enriched by men from every school and every social class (p. 85).

(20.) The Tutorial Classes are of course open to women upon the same terms as to men; there are several women students in the classes now at work. It is intended that the whole scheme shall benefit the education of working women as much as the education of working men. It would be within the province of the proposed Standing Committee to consider any further steps with regard to the education of working women which may from time to time appear desirable (Prefatory Note).

Some of the above, and other ideas in the Report, have materialized. For example:—

1. Convocation, the sovereign body at the University, on October 27, 1908, "empowered the Extension Delegacy to form a Committee consisting of Working-class representatives in equal numbers with members of the Delegacy."

2. On October 30 "such a Committee was established."

3. "Tutorial Classes will be held this winter" . . . at:—

Chesterfield.

Glossop.

Littleborough.

Longton.

Oldham.

Rochdale.

Swindon.

Wrexham.

4. The Committee for Economics has agreed to the resolution as to the admission of Tutorial Class students to the Diploma Course in Economics.

5. "The Trustees of the University Appeal Fund have approached the University with a view to the establishment of a Lectureship in Political Theory and Institutions."

Supposing, as is more than possible, that the rest of the programme drawn up by the authors of "Oxford and Working-class Education" is adopted by the University and Colleges, what are likely to be the effects on the University and Colleges themselves, on the City of Oxford and, lastly, on the Nation and the Empire? Amongst the results of this far-reaching scheme may be the following:—

I. *Effects on the University and Colleges and on the City of Oxford.*

"We have seen," say the seven Dons and the seven Labour Leaders, "no reason at all for agreeing with the suggestion occasionally made that workmen students would not mix well with men drawn from the 'public' schools or that they would introduce a discordant element into college life." The colleges are, however, at present in the nature of residential clubs, and the proposal is that "the fullest facilities" should be offered for the admission into them of persons drawn from, for example, the Longton University Tutorial Class, a description of which class will be found in Appendix VI.

"This," we are told at p. 105, "was an ideal University class, being representative of all sections of what are known as the middle and working classes. In the class were a gardener, a plumber, a potter's thrower, a potter's decorator, a basket-maker, a miner, a mechanic, a baker, several clerks, a librarian, a grocer, a miller's agent, a railway agent, a clothier, insurance collectors, and elementary school teachers."

One may be permitted to doubt whether gardeners, plumbers, miners and mechanics will mix well with the undergraduates who now occupy the colleges.

The result of the innovation may be that the rich and well-to-do members of the colleges may prefer to be educated elsewhere. In that case—

- (a) The University and Colleges will have some difficulty in raising the £170,000 (*vide* p. 30 of the Report) which, it seems, each year has to be raised from graduates and undergraduates to save the University and Colleges from being run at a loss.
- (b) Many tutors, tradesmen, hotel-keepers, lodging-house keepers and those dependent on them (employees, servants) will find their incomes seriously diminished.
- (c) The colleges which own houses in Oxford will have to let them at lower rents, and thus the income of some of the colleges will decrease.
- (d) North Oxford may cease to be a suburb for, comparatively, rich residents.

The Bishop of Birmingham boldly faces these contingencies. On the 21st of November last he addressed 300 delegates of trade unions and other working-class organizations assembled at Toynbee Hall. Mr. A. E. Zimmern, a member of the Joint Committee, had previously explained the Report to them.

"The Bishop of Birmingham," so *The Times* says, "desired a system in which it would be clearly understood and effectively brought about that persons who did not at once show that they came to the University because they wanted to be students would have to go elsewhere. He was sure that was a reasonable request. If carried out, it would produce a tremendous change. There would be a great displacement of rich or well-to-do young men who wanted to have a good time by serious students who would come equally from all classes, but in large measure from among the workers."

II. *Effects on the Empire and the Nation.*

The Secondary Education of England will have been greatly changed by seven Dons and seven Labour Leaders. The teaching of the workmen by the reformed University is to be of a most peculiar character.

Appendix VII. of this remarkable Report contains the courses "drawn up under the direction of the Sub-committee on *curricula*." Among the subjects to be studied (p. 138) are "The Carbonari" and "Bakounin and the Anarchist parties."

In Appendix VI. there is a Provisional Report on the "Rochdale University Tutorial Class."

"The lecturer," we are told (p. 107), "won the affection and confidence of his class from the outset, and has retained it all along. Mr. Zimmern states that "his method of exposition was academic in the best sense of the term.'"

Mr. A. E. Zimmern was a member of the Joint Committee. He obtained a First Class in Classical Moderations in 1900, a First Class in Literae Humaniores in 1902. He is a Fellow and Tutor of New College.

Appendix VIII. enshrines the views of Mr. A. E. Zimmern and Mr. J. M. Mactavish, Labour Member of the Portsmouth Town Council, on Political Science.

At p. 157 they consider two important topics. "What," they ask, "are political students trying to bring about?" "What is the goal of political study?"

It is best expressed, they answer, in the watchword of the early Revolutionists—Liberty.

By Liberty is meant—

(i.) Economic liberty:—

A man is not free when he is hungry and naked; or when he procures food, shelter, and clothing only by an unhealthy or degrading occupation.

Under modern conditions economic liberty for the many can only be secured through social organization, curtailing some men's licence for other men's liberty.

(ii.) Spiritual liberty:—

A man is not free when he cannot think, speak, and write as he will, and act upon his opinions if he so desires.

Spiritual liberty for the many means freedom from authority; but it can only be secured by curtailing some men's licence to act (*e.g.* criminals or lunatics), or even, in rare cases, to speak and write, for other men's liberty.

The goal of the political student, then, is to remove obstacles to economic and spiritual liberty, and to provide opportunities for men and women and children to develop the good that is in them.

Where liberty begins, politics end.

The goal of political study is not:—

(i.) to change human nature;

(ii.) to introduce any definite political or social or ethical system;

(iii.) to secure liberty to any particular class or

(iv.) any particular nation;

though any or all of these *may* turn out, through study, to be necessary steps or consequences.

Certain questions, Mr. A. E. Zimmern and Mr. J. M. Mactavish tell us, arise for discussion out of the above ideas, *e.g.*, "*Does not an ignorant fanatic achieve more in politics than a skilled political thinker? Is not the use of the intellect in politics enervating? What right has the State to inflict punishment or otherwise to limit a man's freedom? Can a wage earner be considered economically free? How can spiritual liberty be reconciled with any fixed system of religion or morality?*"

We learn also, at page 159, that—

An impartial visitor from another planet, reflecting on our problems of government, would make three observations:—

(i.) That our world is, and has always been, very badly governed.

We are only just beginning to recognize how much a wise government can achieve.

(ii.) That governing is not a very difficult art; it requires much less technical skill and training than engineering or medicine. This can be observed by watching the government of any small community or group of men: *e.g.* a club, a cricket eleven out fielding, a District or Parish Council. Most men submit readily to authority wisely exercised.

(iii.) That the *natural* way of managing government is to put the best man or group of men in command.

The obvious deduction is that Lord Cromer could have been safely replaced in Egypt by Mr. A. E. Zimmern! Does the latter's experience

in helping to govern New College justify his conception of the Art of Government?

The reforms which are urgently needed at the University are reforms in the *curriculum*. To take two striking illustrations from the Modern History School:—

- (1.) The text-books for Political Science are—*Aristotle's Politics*, *Hobbes's Leviathan* and *Maine's Ancient Law*.
- (2.) The recent history of the United States and the history of Japan and China are not included in the subject misnamed "General History."

J. B. RYE.