

A letter to the Provost of Oriel on university extension.

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from the author

A LETTER

TO

THE PROVOST OF ORIEL,

ON

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION.

BY

CHARLES DAUBENY, M.D., F.R.S.,

PROFESSOR OF BOTANY AND RURAL ECONOMY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD.



Oxford and London :
JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

1865.

A LETTER

My dear Sir,

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A LETTER, &c.

MY DEAR PROVOST,

It seems hardly fair to impose upon you the task of perusing pamphlets on University Extension, merely because you have kindly consented on several previous occasions, at a considerable sacrifice of time, to undertake the labour of presiding at meetings held for the purpose of discussing that important object.

But, I fear, no alternative remains for me, but that of addressing to you these hasty remarks through the Press; for although the time allowed for debate on Tuesday next might suffice for the advocacy of measures which had been freely ventilated already, it would hardly admit of my doing justice to one now brought forward for the first time.

Nor should I have an opportunity of propounding my scheme at any subsequent Meeting, at least until after Easter, by which time it may be presumed, that the plans of the Committee will be so far digested, that a new project would scarcely obtain a patient hearing.

Perhaps, indeed, I ought to have availed myself of the opportunity afforded by the preliminary Meeting on the 16th inst., for submitting my views; but as the invitation contained in the Circular implied, that the subject to be then discussed related to "University Extension with especial reference to the education of persons needing assistance, and desirous of admission into the Christian ministry," I felt that with every disposition to further so desirable an object, I might safely leave it to others better qualified than myself

to grapple with it, and therefore was not present on that occasion.

I found however, afterwards, by the published report of the proceedings, that no sooner had the question of University Extension with reference to young men intended for Holy Orders been mooted, than a feeling found expression both amongst the clergy and the laity present, that the subject under consideration ought not to be so limited.

Nor am I surprised that this should have been the case, for if it be important for the interests of society, that an University education be provided for that comparatively small portion of the candidates for Ordination, which does not enjoy that privilege at the present time, how grievous must it seem, that the great body of the other two professions which serve to make up the idea of an University, should be in a manner excluded from our own.

I suppose it will be admitted, that of the candidates for Holy Orders not more than about one-twentieth part is at the present time unable to produce those credentials of fitness which an academical degree is supposed to confer; whilst that of those engaged in the Legal and Medical professions, it would be going beyond the mark if I were to say, that one-twentieth have enjoyed that privilege.

You are reported to have remarked, on winding up the proceedings of the meeting, that we did not want any more Attorneys or Apothecaries — a sentiment in which I cordially concur, in the sense which I am sure your observation was really intended to convey; for as in these professions (may I not say in all?) the demand generally determines the supply, an increase of attorneys and apothecaries implies that of litigation and sickness throughout the country, nei-

ther of which conditions can be contemplated with satisfaction.

But although no one need be anxious for an augmentation in the *quantity* of the raw material, we are all equally interested in the *quality* of the manufactured article; and with respect to my own profession—for to this I propose to confine myself—I would remark, that the Apothecary or general Practitioner, (for the terms are now synonymous,) includes that large body of men to whom is intrusted the health of the great bulk of the community—of nine-tenths probably, of those resident in the large towns, and of the whole population, whether rich or poor, of those whose lot is cast in the country.

If, Mr. Provost, it should ever befall you to be seized with sickness in some country town away from your own residence, you would have, as was the case with one of your brother Heads this summer at the most critical period of his illness, to put up with the services of a General Practitioner, and fortunate would you be if you found yourself in such good hands, as those to which the life of your colleague on that occasion was confided.

But although experience and mother wit may often stand in stead of a good education, it does not justify us in dispensing with the latter—or else why were our Universities established?

Without indeed balancing material against spiritual interests—without enquiring even, how far the latter are influenced by a healthy tone of feeling and morals pervading the members of those two professions, with which we are brought into the most intimate relation, not on one only, but on six days in the week—it is sufficient for me to say, that for the physical well-being of society, a well-informed and well-educated body

of lawyers and medical men is of primary necessity. And I need not suggest to one, who like yourself belongs to a family which has furnished so many distinguished members to the medical profession, what a good education adapted for the latter class of persons really involves.

You will, I am sure, agree with me, that it embraces something more than the regulation standard of professional attainments; that it implies a general development of the faculties of the mind by early discipline—some amount of general information on subjects unconnected with the profession—the habits and feelings of gentlemen—and a moral and religious training.

Now let us briefly consider how far these several requisites are secured by the present ordinary routine of medical education.

The youthful aspirant to the privilege of piloting her Majesty's subjects through the most difficult quicksands of disease has no sooner left his grammar-school, than he becomes apprenticed to an apothecary, with whom he spends at least three years—it was formerly five—engaged in the mechanical employment of compounding medicines, and happy if he can pick up from time to time such scattered crumbs of medical information as may fall from his master's dispensing table. After this he is sent for about three years to London, where he has at one and the same time to commence those scientific studies which are to form the foundation of his professional education, and at the same time to build up that superstructure of medical and surgical knowledge, which is to serve him as his guide through the intricacies of private practice during the rest of his life.

He is, in short, to acquire a mastery at once over

such sciences as Chemistry, Anatomy, Physiology, Botany, Materia Medica, and the theory and practice of Medicine; and to crown it all, he must attend to the clinical instruction afforded in the great medical schools of the metropolis.

And thus whilst he has perhaps six or seven daily lectures on different subjects to attend to, he must find time nevertheless to go through the process which is technically called *walking* the Hospitals. With all our devotion to the Peripatetic Philosophy, we Oxonians, I imagine, would hardly attach much value to such Peripatetic teaching as this.

It is much the same as if a youth destined for Holy Orders were, after leaving school, to be boarded in the house of a country Curate, in order to learn what he could pick up of the details of parochial work, and after this, without passing through the University, were to be transferred at once to some Theological Seminary, where he would be indoctrinated at one and the same time in what are styled "the Humanities" and in the mysteries of theological lore—mingling in his poor bewildered brain Cicero with St. Augustine, and Plato with Chrysostom.

So much for the professional training to which the aspirant to medical practice is subjected.

But what shall we say of that other portion of a sound and liberal education, which comes under the category of moral and religious training?

The medical student, at the most critical period of his life, is plunged into the midst of a vast metropolis without the slightest moral supervision, the smallest check over his conduct or demeanour!

All that is required from him as a passport to the privileges of a Practitioner is that he should produce certificates of having been present for a certain fixed

time at the prescribed courses of lectures, and at the clinical practice of the Hospitals ; as well as of his having arrived at the recognised standard of medical knowledge, as tested by his examination.

Of his attainments in other respects no account is taken, except that a *modicum* of Latin is expected ; nor is it likely that any moral delinquencies he may have been guilty of would ever reach the ears of his Examiners, even if they felt it within the range of their jurisdiction to take cognizance of them.

Now, without underrating the merit of the lectures, the value of the professional instruction imparted, or even the silent influence which a high and healthy tone of morality on the part of the teachers must often exert upon the character of the pupil, I cannot but contend that such a system, or rather want of system, might admit of improvement.

If, for example, the time allotted to apprenticeship with a country apothecary were applied to an attendance on scientific lectures in Oxford, it cannot be disputed, that the student, when he afterwards repaired to London, would be in a better condition to reap advantage from the clinical instruction thus afforded, and at the same time more able to give his undivided attention to the practical details of his profession.

And, moreover, without pretending that the system of moral superintendence pursued in Oxford is as complete as it might be made, no one can doubt that certain checks are imposed upon immorality, and that a higher tone of feeling prevails amongst the young men than is general elsewhere.

But it will be said, that however desirable a University education itself may be, it is out of the reach of the majority of medical students, who can neither

afford the time nor the expense of availing themselves of such a system, as they would be compelled to occupy on the Classics the time that is required for the study of their profession, and also would be entangled in expenses which would far exceed their limited means.

Now there is some truth in this objection, mingled with a good deal of fallacy.

With regard to the studies which would be imposed upon him, it seems to me, that even under the existing regulations, which might not improbably be hereafter relaxed in favour of the medical student, the amount of classical knowledge required is not more than a youth of moderate abilities and diligent habits might readily master during the first year of his undergraduateship, so as to enable him to secure the two remaining ones exclusively for those sciences which are in direct connection with his future profession.

And I am by no means sure, that a student would be a loser in the long run by having his mind directed during the early portion of the time he spends at College to other than scientific acquirements.

I am not one of those, whose attachment to Physical Science leads them to disparage the devotion even of the whole period of academical life to classical and mathematical studies, on the part of youths who are able and willing to obtain a full mastery over these subjects.

The grasp of mind resulting from this early and severe discipline may often compensate for the postponement of purely professional pursuits to a period later than is common.

The late Sir Robert Peel was not the worse statesman, Gladstone a less skilful financier, or Sir Roundell Palmer a less accomplished lawyer, for having had their ambition during their stay in Oxford limited to

the achievement of the highest academical distinctions. Nor is it uncommon for a physician who, from his attachment to academical studies, had begun his scientific ones later than his comrades, to outstrip them afterwards in the race of life owing to the superiority of his mental training.

But what does seem to me a subject of regret is, that a young man who wants either the disposition or the ability to advance beyond the threshold of classical learning should, after having gone through the prescribed ordeal of Moderations, be precluded from the acquisition of other knowledge more congenial by the necessity of getting up the few books of Greek and Latin which are required for his final Pass Examination; the only result of this, to him, irksome process being, that he leaves the University with a distaste for all sorts of literary occupation in after life.

The *beau idéal*, however, which has been above sketched out for the education of a youth of high intellect, and ardent love of learning, requires for its realization the command both of time and money, and the ordinary medical student will no doubt be glad to avail himself of the relief afforded by the late University Statute by escaping at an earlier period from the trammels of the classics.

He would, however, apply to his new studies with a mind developed by a better preliminary training, and may therefore be expected, in the course of the two remaining years spent at the University, to overtake those who may have commenced them a year earlier.

And then with regard to the cost of his education, there seems no reason why his necessary expenses at the University should exceed those he would incur during a similar time spent at the Hospitals.

In spite of all that has been said and written on the great Bread and Butter question, I contend, that a better dinner may be had at many Colleges and Halls, than is supplied at the chop-houses to which the London Hospital students resort at a price little or not at all more moderate. And it is notorious that even a humble lodging in the City would cost more than the rent of a set of rooms in most of our colleges.

The sum, too, which a medical Apprentice disburses to the Apothecary who lodges and boards him during the time he engages his services as the compounder of his medicines, would go a great way towards the payment of battels for a three years' residence in Oxford.

Nevertheless it must be confessed, that a difficulty presents itself to the residence of a medical student within the walls of our colleges, which cannot easily be got over.

Not only do the general habits of our Undergraduates, their luxurious entertainments, their expensive amusements, and the disproportionate importance now attached to athletic exercises, ill accord with the course of life prescribed to those who enter upon this laborious Profession, but the tone of thought, and the line of study, which are in harmony with the career of one intended for Holy Orders, is hardly such as he would find suitable to his future vocation.

A young man, therefore, drafted into a college tenanted by the ordinary set of Oxford Undergraduates, would either feel himself out of his element, and cut off in a great degree from the sympathies of those about him, or else, by adopting their habits and modes of thinking, would be apt to acquire a distaste for the studies which are to qualify him for his future career.

Accordingly, even those who would prefer the system of merging in the general body of Undergraduates those youths of slender means, for whom they are anxious to supply the means of academical education as preparatory to the Christian ministry, may well hesitate, before they attempt to extend this plan to the class whose interests we are now considering.

Two schemes, however, may be suggested, either of which would seem calculated to meet the difficulty.

The first is one which involves no change in the existing system, as it merely takes advantage of facilities already open to us, either by the extension of existing Halls, or by the setting up of new ones; all that is required being to erect an Establishment under academical rules, spacious enough to admit a considerable body of medical students—managed with such attention to economy as to reduce their expenses to a *minimum*—and holding out to them, from the number received, no temptation to cultivate any great degree of intimacy with the richer members of the other Colleges.

No doubt this isolation would be in itself an evil, but it seems an inevitable one, if we are to retain this class of students within our precincts at all; and at any rate they would form a less completely detached body than they do at present in London, and although not in habits of daily intercourse with the members of other Societies, would not be beyond the influence of the *genius of the place*.

The other scheme is the one which has found an advocate in Dr. Temple, and is proposed for adoption by the Dean of Christ Church.

It proposes to allow any student, without attaching himself to any Hall or College, to graduate here, upon

producing certificates of attendance on certain courses of lectures, after passing the ordinary academical examinations.

As this scheme would remove a large class of our students from all discipline or superintendence beyond what could be imposed by the University authorities, I should be averse to its adoption, unless a dogged opposition to other means of University extension forces it upon us, as the only method of meeting the wants of society.

In the meantime it may be enough to remark, that the isolation which might be urged as an objection to the previous plan applies equally to this, as the same causes, which render the medical students a separate and detached class in London, would operate upon them equally here, whether they were concentrated in one building, or distributed in lodgings throughout the city.

I should prefer, therefore, the former scheme, at least under present circumstances, as the most feasible, provided only that means could be found for defraying the inevitable expense which its adoption would at first entail.

For its success depends upon providing accommodation at once to a body of students, belonging to the same rank of life, and intended for the same profession, sufficiently considerable, to render it unnecessary for them to seek for society elsewhere.

But this difficulty might, as it appears to me, be got over, by procuring either from the funds of the University or from private individuals, the sum requisite for erecting a plain but spacious building, to be let for a moderate rent to some person approved by the committee who might be willing to undertake the risk of accommodating and boarding on easy terms a suffi-

cient number—say thirty or forty—of young men destined for the medical profession. And it would be but just, that as the experiment is a new one, a sum should also be provided, by the aid of one or other of the expedients suggested, for guaranteeing to him, during a certain time, a portion at least of any loss he might sustain.

I conceive, therefore, that no contribution to the great cause of Academical Extension would be more serviceable, than that of joining with others to create a fund, for erecting such a building, and for affording the requisite guarantee to the person who might engage in such an undertaking—and I should be quite willing, if others would come forward, to take my share in the speculation, by subscribing £100 towards these objects.

It may be asked, perhaps, why at an advanced period of life, I should, for the first time, be so earnest in inviting to the University a class of youths who never before appeared to engage my sympathies.

But it would have been a mockery to invite a medical student to Oxford at a time when physical science formed no part of the University *curriculum*, when chemistry was relegated, like a sort of occult Science or black Art, to the underground apartments of the old Ashmolean building, with an endowment so scanty, that my worthy predecessor was compelled from lack of means to keep down his scientific aspirations, and treat such pursuits as quite subordinate to his medical duties; and when anatomy had no *status* in the University, and was left to the scanty encouragement doled out to it by a private college.

But since the period alluded to, the University, in obedience, as some will have it, to the pressure from

without, but, as I would rather believe, from a due appreciation of the duties imposed upon it as trustee to the large funds for educational purposes placed at its disposal, has not only recognised the class of studies alluded to, but has also erected a building for their cultivation, which, in its Collections of Natural History, its Lecture Rooms, its Library, its Dissecting Rooms, and its Laboratories, furnishes all the appliances for scientific research which the most ardent student can desire, and which is under the direction of a staff of professors who, to say the least, will not suffer by comparison with those of any other rival establishment in Great Britain.

Yet with all this it cannot be considered quite satisfactory, when we find, that whilst everything else in this country is in a state of progression, the University in point of numbers should remain stationary, and that scarcely more students should resort to it, than was the case, when England was so much less populous, so much less wealthy, and so much less eager for knowledge than at present.

I have indeed heard it maintained, that Oxford must have been principally designed for the clerical profession, because its founders were principally Ecclesiastics, and because its endowments were in a great measure confined to persons in Holy Orders.

But it must be recollected, that in mediæval times most of the available wealth of the country, and all its learning, were centred in the Clergy, and that the only instructors that could be found for youth were taken from their ranks.

And at any rate the earliest of our Benefactors, Walter de Merton, evinced his repugnance to too close an association with the clerical profession, in interdict-

ing any member of a Monastic Order from holding a Fellowship in his college; and our own noble Founder, although himself a Prelate, recognised to the full the threefold division of human knowledge into theological, moral, and physical, by establishing for his College and for the University generally, a Prælector in each of these departments.

It is hard to say, how far the exemption which the Colleges obtained from the fate which awaited the conventual establishments in the reign of Henry VIII. might depend upon his recognition of their claims to be considered as the appendages of a great University; but at least it is certain, that if the legislature in subsequent days had regarded them merely as parts of a great Ecclesiastical Seminary, it would have felt its duty to act, as other nations have done, in providing for the community, centuries ago, something more comprehensive.

France had her Sorbonne, but did not therefore consider it less necessary, even under the old Regime, to establish the University of Paris; and in like manner Oxford, so long as it enjoys the privileges and protection afforded to it as a national University, cannot escape from the responsibilities which that designation involves.

Hoping that you may still for many years continue to adorn the distinguished Society over which you have so long presided,

I remain, my dear Provost,

Very faithfully yours,

CHARLES DAUBENY.

BOTANIC GARDEN,
Dec. 1, 1865.