

# UNIVERSITIES

JOHN MURRAY

WE are met to commemorate a man and his work, and his great love for this ancient University. He was the friend of many here. I did not know him: *Vergilium vidi tantum*: I recall a figure of resolute dignity, and, till he broke it, of an expressive silence. His love for libraries I have come to share: though I have no recollection, let me confess it, of ever entering King's Library in my student years. It was believed to be haunted by Professors; many students were therefore shy of it, and some, very curiously, thought resort to it not only needless but unfair. Since then, I have had a hand in building a library, and have found, without surprise, that students in Devon now as in Aberdeen then need encouragement and advice in its use. In memory of Peter Anderson, I commend your library to all such.

There are some things that were worse than the account history gives of them, and some that have been better. Of the latter sort are Universities on the whole, and this University particularly, as I am well convinced, having studied here as well as read in its history.

Why there should be so much in the histories of Universities to perplex and distress the friendly reader, such as idleness, triviality, misbehaviour, factions, abuses, and obstinacy, is hard to answer. Universities best pleased the news-mongers, perhaps, at their worse times, and got small credit when they went peaceably about their work, which they did for the most part. The towns, moreover, that harboured them were in two minds, being in general proud of them and knowing them to be profitable neighbours, but ready to carp and pick quarrels with them upon occasion. Not only their own neighbourhood but the whole nation has somewhat played the stepmother to them. Without having the lead in affairs, they have often suffered as if it had been so—lying in no such backwater as to escape the violent tide of great events. Was the King weak, or the Government foolish, or the Church corrupt or oppressive? Were the citizens rebellious, or the times squalid and coarse? The Universities for sure would be the worse for it, being infected with the common errors and the general calamity. In better times they had enough to do to recover themselves. Their own action was laggard, and their helpers were unready. Their

1. The P. J. Anderson Memorial Lecture, delivered October 30 at the University of Aberdeen.

misfortune lasted longer, most often, than the evils that occasioned it, so that they knew the trough of the wave better than the crest. It was thus for long, and until the present age. Nowadays all is changed here. The Government and the Councils under it, the merchants and manufacturers, the rich and the poor alike have become sworn friends of the Universities, and ply them plentifully with money and counsel. Now Cinderella is bidden on all hands to the ball. But these new friends are still of two minds about it. They challenge the Universities to a sort of leadership in the nation, but also load them down with much labour of various sorts. Cinderella, though she dance, must still serve and cook for them, and better and more than before. It is not easy for a woman to be both a Martha and a Mary. How it will end with her is a riddle.

How it began in Scotland and here in Aberdeen five centuries ago is the tale of a crusade. The land had the taste and the gifts for learning. The ancient Church needed the buttress of new institutions. Proud and emulous blood was ripening a nation. Universities were being founded throughout the Continent in the XVth Century: three<sup>1</sup> colleges were founded at Oxford that still support her fame, besides some that have perished, and five<sup>2</sup> at Cambridge. England, rich and populous, had only two Universities, and discouraged the erection of others. The expediency of concentration was scarcely to be doubted. But doubted it was in the three Scottish foundations of the XVth Century, and most in Aberdeen, where before long there were as many Universities as in all England. The "nations" of Paris, the most cosmopolitan of Universities, were copied here with minute loyalty along with the essentials, —faculties, dignities, procedures, and times and seasons. When his eye is truly caught, or his imagination kindled, the Scot is thorough. The slow centuries have justified the ambitious scheme which ruled the meagre beginnings. Dispersion of the Universities and the divisions of the students bespoke a nation that was still in the making. Scotland bred many men of notable talent, but lacked the heart and the skill for combination. Who shall say that the Scots of those days were not the best judges of their needs? In all centuries the intensity of the Scots has worked divisively: and among them, happily, divisions can be the salt of life.

1. Lincoln, All Souls, Magdalen.

2. Christ's, King's, Queen's, S. Catharine's, Jesus.

The new foundations were spared few of the vicissitudes of infancy. In their distresses it is tempting, and easy, to discern the defects of the Scots qualities. Glasgow, for instance, began amid fanfares of rejoicing: it graduated students in the first session: but in a few decades it had dwindled almost to nothing. Though Aberdeen profited by some of the Glasgow lessons, as by paying its professors, it fell away presently. For the first 20 years St. Andrews was without a habitation. The brave projects seem to have been ill prepared and ill followed up. Plans, doubtless, outran means. The Church and the Bishops, for whatever reasons, may have acted hastily. The schools may have failed to supply students, and the Colleges, forced into school work, competed poorly with England and the Continent. But it is more congenial to seek the causes of these events in the idiosyncrasies of the nation than in its circumstances. The impetuous Scottish spirit, fired by a vision but oppressed by penury, schemed for a future greater and remoter than it knew. It was often thus in Scottish education. The law of 1496 drove few or none of the barons' heirs to school or college. The enlightened code of the *Book of Discipline* hung fire for centuries. One generation traced in the soil the prophetic outlines of great buildings which later generations raised long after. The Scot's dearest promises to himself were proclaimed in advance from the housetops. He nailed his colours to the mast, and then he built his ship.

Universities, like democracies, are easier to enumerate than to define. It is best to take their word for it, and to be content with the empirical marks. Though all Universities professed the same ideals—truth, knowledge, teaching, culture—the unity of their faith permitted extreme diversity of works. They grew in no vacuum, but each under the selective influences of its habitat. There were resemblances of a formal sort: the traditional phrases in which Popes and Emperors were accustomed to give their blessing, the dignity of *studium generale* with its reciprocal rights, which were often refused by sister institutions, and the academic uniformities of office, title, and procedure. But the juridical facade could not guarantee uniformity of substance or standard, though other factors for long assured a certain unity. For many centuries the sway of the Roman Church and the Latin language made Europe in a measure one land, and a corresponding unity of Christian culture with various accretions prevailed throughout the Uni-

versities. In 1895 Dr. Rashdall wrote of the mediaeval Universities:<sup>3</sup>

Their organization and their traditions, their studies and their exercises affected the progress and the intellectual development of Europe more powerfully, or (perhaps it should be said) more exclusively, than any schools in all likelihood will ever do again.

The growth of the modern nations gave the Universities a new bias. It is difficult to think of them nowadays as anything but national, though the change is not wholly for good. If Dr. Rashdall were now, after 50 years, to revisit Europe and the Universities and to trace the magisterial advances of research in the natural sciences and their applications, he might feel disposed, though regretfully, to revise his prophecy.

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The Scottish Universities have been as racy of the soil as any. It is a common fashion to smile at the academic ways of a century ago, or two centuries, or three. But all methods, old fashioned and up-to-date alike, are to be judged not by their pretensions, or by the assumption of modernity, which is nothing but the deference that each age in turn pays to itself, but by results. The proof is in the output. Did the Scottish Universities, did Aberdeen in the past succeed in sending out young men fitted to make a mark in their calling? There can be only one answer. Their recruits, as all of us here will agree, were at least of average talent. John Aubrey, who wrote of Oxford undergraduates in the Civil Wars "Ingeniose youths, as Rosebudds, imbibe the morning dew", would have found much here to please him. The Universities prepared young men *inter alia* for emigration. Many of them perforce went far afield. "Of four surgeons bred in the country, three go abroad, and of these scarcely one in ten returns."<sup>4</sup> That the Scottish Universities were well reputed elsewhere needs no proof, but may be confirmed by an intimate illustration. An Englishman, Mr. Edward Brown, records staying with a Lincolnshire gentleman in 1660. "His family", he writes, "consisted of two daughters who lived at home with him, his only son studying then at Aberdeen, in Scotland, whither his father had sent him to preserve the purity of his morals." A little later he proceeds, "When the young gentleman arrived, he

3. *The Universities of the Middle Ages*, (New Edition, 1936). Vol. I., p. 3.

4. *The Interest of Scotland, 1733*, p. 121.

appeared to have made the best use of his time and of his studies, having acquired all the advantages that could be drawn from an academical education, without receiving from it the least stain of pedantry, or seeming to have leaned in any degree to the other extreme in order to avoid it.”<sup>5</sup> Mr. Brown was in love with one of the daughters, though I doubt whether this circumstance weakens his testimony: on the contrary. He omits to say, alas! whether this paragon went to King’s or to Marischal.

Year by year, generation after generation, Aberdeen sent out notable men to the towns and the countryside and the ends of the earth. There is no doubting it. But how? The method was no secret or monopoly, though it was applied here with drastic thoroughness. Aberdeen was Methodist long before the Wesleys. It is not difficult to evoke in imagination the typical influences. Each fresh group of students worked side by side throughout four sessions of hard teaching and lecturing. Together they studied the subjects of the curriculum in a rigid order without exemptions or options. The same Mentor guided them, it might be, throughout the course: for the old rotative system of teaching lasted longer here than elsewhere. Examinations were frequent and searching. The close and continuous contact made it an exacting life, though it welded each successive group into one, and forged strong ties. The discipline was pervasive, especially for those who resided in the College. So disciplinary a scheme provoked some to revolt and others to desert, and it must have failed, had the discipline been all. But the eager and gifted youth came bent on learning and on carving a career. They were introduced in forceful if conventional style to various styles,—linguistic and literary, philosophical, and scientific. If they did not reach the heights, they beheld them, and learned to climb. It was not for them to seek out, as yet, the comfortable retreats of specialization. In the very air of the College religion importuned them. This was indeed a community whose daily life assured a high degree of academic domestication. In the things of the mind it succeeded doubly; by imparting a culture in common, and by opening the gateways of scholarship and science. A humane ambition inspired the entire scheme. Orientation in the wide world of thought, the appeal to imagination in various forms, the energizing of the individual in a close-knit society,—these

5. *Travels and Adventures of Mr. Edward Brown, Esqre.*, 1739, pp. 4 and 7.

things, the core, as it might well seem, of University education, were offered by Aberdeen. They were the making of many fine men and fruitful minds.

It would be foolish to idealize the past, but still more foolish to ignore its lessons. One of these, and perhaps the least disputable, the value of residence, has lately effected a mass conversion. The residual doubt touches the application rather than the principle. It is reasonable to ask whether the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge should be followed elsewhere. In respect of residence the two old Universities may be regarded with justice as offshoots of the Public Schools, from which they receive large numbers of well-seasoned and congenial entrants. The other Universities, recruited very largely from day-schools, confront a different problem. Whether even in the old Universities a large College would continue to be a community in the same sense and degree, and to exert the same beneficial influences, if its recruitment were as in the other Universities, may be doubted. For these, whether in England or Scotland, a regime of separate Halls of Residence of limited size, less institutional, more intimate, and more home-like might be expected to offer surer opportunities. The residential plan is disliked root and branch by many Scots. Some think it is not only foreign but fatal to the racial *ethos*, and indeed unreasonable. It was for long part of the Aberdeen tradition, of that tradition at its best. The cessation of residence at King's 120 years ago was due less to policy than to incidental causes, the most decisive of which, it is to be suspected, was finance. The residential plan is of such evident utility and amenity that it must be a strange University and a strange race that being given the means could not carry it to success. While history is against the enemies of residence in Aberdeen, psychology is with them in part. In Scotland more than in England, and in Aberdeen more perhaps than elsewhere in Scotland the technique and the style of residence need to be carefully chosen. The youth are likely to thrive best in small halls. Heaven forbid that any should count the cost too closely!

From community as an ideal to residence as an effective factor in it is an easy step. It is less easy to decide how the principle of residence should be embodied. Besides size and cost, many matters are contested,—the mode of supervision, discipline, the conditions of membership and its duration, and the general style. The prime requisite is an accepted philosophy

of residence, and none exists: though there is no other defence against makeshifts and half-measures, and above all against the parsimony that ranks the moral and social criteria below certain others. The wisest policy, to be sure, would lay a very heavy burden on the Universities. But the backward view is bright. The housing of students, according to the standards of each past age, has seldom been left to the Universities to shoulder alone. Help has flowed in from various sources, from royal founders and monastic houses, from bishops, from bands of pioneers and the friendly rich. Here is a field which benefactors have made well-nigh their own: and neither is their race extinguished nor the Universities' need of them. A certain psalm used to be sung thus in Bristol:

I to the Wills will lift mine eyes,  
From whence doth come mine aid.

There are few points of University policy in which the expert and the layman are so much at one as the urgency of residence. The humane mission of Universities has in practice no truer symbol or stronger buttress. No precautions in the power of Universities are likely to do away entirely with wastage of character and opportunity; but residence is a strong check, perhaps the strongest. This matter moreover touches the parents very closely. It bears on employment, for Universities must market their output under sharpening competition. A degree being a hall-mark, it is natural to expect the imprint to be borne out by the metal and the style.

The benefits of residence accrue only gradually. It takes time to become known and make friends, to strike roots in use and wont, to win a standing. Residence being a hierarchical idea, a three years' space appears to be the minimum: a year of being nobody, a final year as a somebody, and a year between—if there can be no more—of edifying prospect and retrospect. The prime authority is the Warden's, but shared and delegated by him in proportion as social sense and responsibility spread among members. Pity the Warden whose men are transients of one grading, who therefore cannot call in seniors to his aid! Pity too the Warden whose men are all of one department or faculty! Life in a hall, if it does not broaden, is almost certain to narrow. To intensify and to liberalize are both legitimate ends, though a Hall of Residence would be unwise to try to achieve both. Graduates and researchers respond to the sem-

inarist way. The mixed liberalizing method suits undergraduates, and their case is the more urgent. One truly fortunate would inhabit each type in turn.

The contemporary fashion of making topics into problems has not spared the Universities. Fashion, for once, is right. To enquire into them, while reasonable at any time, and obligatory in this lectureship, is enjoined by the circumstances of this era of change. What in essence and function are Universities? For they have, presumably, enough of wholeness, of organic unity and selfhood to justify the question. In what sense, and in what respects are they a problem, or, it may be, many problems? A first answer is easy: their root is the passion for knowledge, for expression, for controversy and teaching. So wide an ideal offers scope for diverse tastes and powers. It opens the way for a regime of variety. Freedom of mental attitudes and activities being the very element of Universities, the regime tends towards the extremes. Dispersive interest, divergent methods, conflicting values make themselves felt, and bring along, in the fullness of time, a multitude of *imperia in imperio*. The individualistic and separatist liberties of faculties, departments, sub-departments, and solitary specialists are the prime factors in the growth of knowledge. This tide flows strongly, though irregularly: it neither can be nor ought to be impeded. It vivifies and enriches the sphere of the Universities. But how? By a sort of conquest, a seeming conquest, so to speak, of the Whole by the Part. The prestige of the advancing sciences makes other elements of University life seem secondary or unreal. The enchantments of the Middle Ages were as nothing to this New Magic. Throngs beset the gateway of Aladdin's Cave, and the world awaits impatiently the latest bulletins of discovery. The industries, proud to be partners of the Universities, shower gifts, and plan the commercial uses. The Universities have swum, at last, into the ken of multitudes, who, reckoning chiefly by drugs and bombs, judge these utilities to be their all in all.

The dazzling success of modern science is one of man's greatest achievements. The Universities are justly proud of their share in it. That we are here tonight, and not dead or enslaved, we owe largely to our own scientists. The vision of science on the march, the spearhead of researchers leading, mild bespectacled preoccupied figures, but more terrible than an army with banners, has thrilled the world, and at last alarmed

it. It is a sort of militarism in mufti. But the military analogies are unsuited to Universities. The spearhead is not the whole of science, nor science of the Universities, and still less of life. There are many other matters besides natural science for imagination to illumine. The task of every school, in the widest sense of that word, is to evoke and exercise imagination in all the fields of judgment and discovery and creativeness.

The Universities have an advantage over most agencies of education in the period, the very responsive period, which the young spend in them. Adult life is opening up ahead: now, if ever, is the time for boldness of thought, for wide-ranging sympathy, for the intuitive gleam. It is an exploratory as well as an acquisitive age. The young, the generous and confident young, seek ambitiously for comprehensive truth. The philosophic instinct is awake—for how long, who shall say? The synoptic outlook on the world and on life is balanced by an inward sense of mission. It would be a congenial confirmation of this sense, for those who have it, if it should be reflected or matched in the dispositions of the university itself. There are questions, mostly unspoken, in the minds of the young as well as of their elders—whether the Universities, besides being the staff-officers of all conquering knowledge, have a mission to the young, who are still on the threshold of study and life, and how they conceive it. An old nation of strong continuity, such as this nation, has racial memory, and is liable to nostalgic pangs. The Universities, it suspects, have surrendered part of their prerogatives over the young, scarcely knowing to whom or to what. It was not thus in the heyday of the Aberdeen tradition, nor in the remoter past elsewhere. The Middle Ages had an inspiring vision of Universities. Their very being was thought of as a spirituality, and their work as a mission. The early foundations date from times which it is usual to call the ages of faith—ages, to be sure, that always lie behind. Noble aims are easier proposed than achieved. The history of the early Universities has often proved the saw, *corruptio optimi pessima*. But idealism often prevailed in them, and powerfully.

In the last century many new Universities have arisen in this country. Idealism and utility jointly inspired them. They were intended to foster the love of knowledge for itself and the enrichments of the spirit, and also to serve workaday needs. The rapid decades since 1828 have upset the balance. The

sphere of utility expands steadily, while the beatific vision has grown faint. Its light pales, to say the least of it, amid those fiercer fires. The onset of a prodigious usefulness already threatens the Universities. An imponderable of value is in danger of being lost, an essence of which the humanist is assured and the utilitarian dubious or scornful. A University is like a man: it may gain the whole world, and lose its own soul. To be both soulless and serviceable is given to few institutions, and least to Universities. The loss of its soul, of its humane message, or of the prophetic and magisterial tones in declaring it, is only the beginning of losses for a University, and not for itself alone.

It is time to sum up. Against utility no frontal battle, or any battle, can be won: and none is needed. The specialist drift cannot be reversed, or the proliferation of specialisms halted. The present dispensation permits and blesses separatism. The embattled march of the spearhead, in its larger and its lesser commands, is likelier to gather force than to lose it. In one sense the University is all these things, and many more that could be named, but in another none of them. Its peculiar duty overrides the obligations and the predilections of its parts, though it cannot be discharged without their help. The parts enjoy no freehold: and this is their rent, and reasonable. Towards the individual as man and citizen the University bears the responsibility for a sufficient culture in due proportion to the width of contemporary scholarship and science. The service of the common end of culture is the true bond of union in Universities. Its weakening gives the signal for the separatist revolution. When it breaks, the corporate obligation dissolves away, and the multiplicity of studies turn into ends in themselves and for themselves. In this revolution, which seems to be threatened in sporadic outbreaks, discipline and liaison break down. Of the esoteric specialisms none knoweth another. In the humane studies the effects are as severe as elsewhere. The insidious drift turns them into a sort of science: science for science's sake is the ruin of some of them. The private procedure of comprehensive investigation, of close enquiry and minute judgment, incumbent in the humanities as elsewhere, usurps upon the culture which scholarship should serve. All scholarship is for culture, but not all of it is culture. The test is, can it be built up into personality? Some branches offer meagre or refractory material. Let them be excused.

Other sources, humanities and sciences in general, yield abundance. Men of science claim that science is cultural, both wrongly and rightly: wrongly because they do not present it culturally, rightly in that by taking pains they could. The Arts claim is also both wrong and right: the Arts teacher, unless he takes pains, may wander as widely from the cultural as the scientist.

Culture, it is to be suspected, lies less in the matter than in the manner. Presentation is the crux. Neither the Science man nor the Arts man who views his subject on the lines of his lifelong private bias, in armchair rumination or effortless mastery, or probing familiarly in his pet problems, is likely to hit the mark. Life-interests that ripen into a rich personal culture may yet be incommunicable. To distil the cultural in suitable draughts and potency within the compass of a year's course, or less, is a hard test for both speaker and hearer. Culture emerges in a contact, in mutual stimulus. Culture is drama, and the nerve of drama is imagination. Culture is challenge and persuasion. Culture is self-defence, of the chemist addressing the historians, of the classic addressing the zoologists, of the man of literature addressing the lawyers, of the lawyer addressing the lawless men of your Four Nations. Culture is combat, and conquest, and triumph, as the victorious speaker, with eyes aglow, regains the unfamiliar anteroom.

I hark back to the old Aberdeen tradition. Much of it is still worth pondering: the hard lecturing; the variety of the fare; the practice of orientation; the organic four-year plan, an inexorable epitome of the culture of those days; the preoccupation with persons; the force of community; the masculine key; the discipline; the output of men. Aberdeen exercised them in all the gamut of their faculties. They learned enough of many things to know how to learn more. The deeper layers of growing minds, where the moral initiatives lie, were not left untouched. An all-round education gave those men, shall I say? a moral gyroscope. From this remote region they went out into the world-life of mankind, and bore a significant part.

If this is still true of the Aberdeen men, all is well.