

THURSDAY, JULY 26, 1877

A MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY

THE movement of the authorities of Owens College, represented in their memorial to the Duke of Richmond on Friday last, is certainly one of the healthiest important educational advances of recent years. It is an outcome of an impatience of pure examination and a revived belief in the educative influences of association of young men with each other and with masters of the subjects in which they happen to be interested, which have been gradually but surely growing up among educationalists.

Like a few hundreds of other institutions, including Oxford, Cambridge, and the Scotch Universities, Owens College is affiliated to the University of London. Twenty years ago this meant that only students of these institutions could present themselves for London degrees. But their members multiplied—and every weaker member added to the list of affiliated colleges supplied a new reason for still farther widening the bounds of the University. It was natural that in time the outsiders educated at home, with private tutors, or in unrecognised and unaffiliated institutions should knock at the doors of the university and demand admission. After they did, it was found in the end impossible to refuse them. Since that date the University examines everybody, wherever he has been educated, and its influence is to assimilate what one may call organised institutions of individuality and character to the unorganised or semi-organised types of the crammer's school or the private student of cram books. For the school or the private student it has been and still is of the utmost value. For higher colleges it is a great centralisation, objectionable only because it is not complete, not having really swallowed up the Scotch and Irish universities as well as Oxford and Cambridge. Mr. Lowe's ideal doubtless is that the most intelligent, impartial, perhaps bloodless of examiners, selected from all the world, should prescribe the subjects of examination, and should thereby dictate from the standpoint of the highest human omniscience, the courses of all teaching institutions, and should, like Minos, Æacus, and Rhadamanthus, decide in final award the character and place in the universe alike of teacher and of taught. This ideal has been realised in the Chinese empire, and many excellent arguments can be stated in its favour. It is inadequately realised in this country, because all incorporated universities have been left practically outside of the scheme. Owens College is the first of the non-incorporated actual or possible universities which asks also to be released.

It is possible to offer the petitioners something they do not seek. Owens and other residence colleges object to be controlled by a mere examining board. But there are Universities like Oxford and Cambridge which are not mere examining boards, which have resident students, where the examiners are in frequent and living contact with the students, from whom, indeed, they are often removed only by a few additional years. Five years before, the men who preside over the triposes may have them

selves sat for examination. Might not Oxford or Cambridge supply a less narrow and technical examination than London? Could these universities not affiliate Owens College to themselves in some more living bond than has now become possible elsewhere?

There is an excellent and all but final answer. Oxford was asked to do it for King's College, London, and after mature deliberation it deliberately declined. Probably it could not see its way to work out this more living association. There is one kind practicable—such as Oxford and Cambridge practise between themselves. A man may count a certain number of terms at Cambridge for his degree at Oxford, just as he may count so many sessions at Edinburgh for his degree at Glasgow. There is another kind conceivable. The teachers of both places may be associated with each other, with or without outside examiners, for the examination of the students of both, and the programmes of examination, and to some extent of teaching, may thus be settled in common. Oxford was not willing to associate itself with King's College in either of these ways, and there is no reason to believe that it would care so to associate itself with Owens College or any other institution. Such an association would imply an equality which the older universities can scarcely be asked to admit; and the second mode of association would institute a sort of outside interference with them which they would never allow. The simplest and most satisfactory university is self-contained, teaching and examining its own men under the stimulus of rivalry and public criticism, and with the help, perhaps, of outside examiners. Oxford and Cambridge see no reason why they should descend from their own secure and satisfactory position and tempt the dangers of confederation.

It remains to ask what good it can and what harm it might do to grant the prayer of the petitioners. The first question need scarcely be answered. It is an obvious advantage to every district to have a great centre of high thinking and noble living planted in its midst. But there is an equally obvious disadvantage in the undue multiplication of universities. There may be serious objections, as Prof. Huxley puts it, to any official system of branding our young herrings with B.A. or M.A. But so long as we keep to the system of branding we ought not to be too free with our brands. There ought not to be too many, and there are a good many in the United Kingdom with no means of telling which is a good brand and which is a bad one. There is no doubt that, as far as it goes, the objection is sound, and that we ought not to have too many degree-granting bodies. The question is whether we have—whether the precise limit at which we ought to stop has been reached—whether the new claimant is not as fully entitled as some of the old-established institutions to an independent status and existence. In England we have very few branding bodies, and every guarantee is offered by the Manchester authorities that their brand will be of the very first quality. They propose to have outside assessors to help them to see to it; the one thing they ask is that having the responsibility of teaching they shall have an equal share in directing the examinations. It seems a reasonable and modest request.