

## THE TRACTARIANS AND EDUCATION

THE significant date, October 9th, 1845, recalls a crisis in the religious development of an individual, and through him in the religious history of England. But it has also a significance in quite another sphere, since it marks the end of an epoch in university history: with the repression of the Tractarian Movement Laudian Oxford finally ceased to be. Newman realised his defeat in his campaign on behalf of dogmatic religion, and recognised his conquerors. 'The men who had driven me from Oxford,' he admits in the *Apologia*, 'were distinctly the Liberals.'<sup>1</sup> And again: 'I found no fault with the Liberals; they had beaten me in a fair field.'<sup>2</sup> With this Matthew Arnold agrees; but he, while admitting that other and more intelligent forces were arrayed against the Movement, less politely characterises the liberalism on which it broke as 'middle-class liberalism.'<sup>3</sup> The effects of the Movement persisted in the country at large; but the Movement itself could no longer be properly regarded as peculiarly the Oxford Movement. As for Oxford itself, Mark Pattison observed that, if he had gone to sleep in 1845, and been awakened in 1850, he would have found himself in a new world.<sup>4</sup> For the time being the University abandoned its previous interest in theological controversies, and directed its attention upon itself and its specific function, upon the educational demands of the age and its own response to them. The inevitable liberal reaction, as soon as it gathered force, and this soon happened, rudely thrust aside as irrelevant all the debatable issues that had made life uncomfortable during the past decade, and forced to the front the solitary question of

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<sup>1</sup> p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 23 (Popular Edition).

<sup>4</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 236.

University reform. Theology gave place to education, as the absorbing topic of the day.

This sudden revolution, this complete change in the intellectual centre of gravity, lends a certain colour to the conclusion that the Movement acted as a brake, and prevented the University from fulfilling its proper duty. Goldwin Smith, who in spite of his comparative youth was one of the prominent figures in the reaction, did not hesitate to subscribe to this conclusion, and even gave it publicity. He thought that, 'if it had not been for the Class List which kept a certain number of us working at classics and mathematics, the University would have been a mere battlefield of theologians.'<sup>5</sup> At the end of his life Mark Pattison, whose judgements on men and things never mellowed with increasing years, expressed agreement with this extreme view in his *Memoirs*. In a single sweeping sentence he left his final opinion to posterity: 'Probably there was no period of our history during which, I do not say science or learning, but even the ordinary study of the classics was so profitless or at so low an ebb as during the progress of the Tractarian controversy.'<sup>6</sup> It may be doubted, however, whether he would have given utterance to so condemnatory a judgment at an earlier period, when the memory of his own formative years was still fresh in his mind. At any rate, in his paper on *Learning in the Church of England* written in 1863, he identified the Movement in its first phase with 'a revival of the spirit of learned research,'<sup>7</sup> and recalled the taunt once levelled at the leaders that they laid the road to truth through learning, thus excluding the plain and unlettered man from salvation.<sup>8</sup> If this was so, and undoubtedly the taunt had a basis of fact, their influence educationally must have been

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<sup>5</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> *Essays*, 11, p. 269.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

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for the good. It is a commonplace to-day that research falls within the scope of a University; but that was hardly appreciated, as it should have been, in Oxford a century ago. Newman, for example, took patristics as his particular line, and Pusey Oriental studies; and they were, both of them, men who did not let time hang idle on their hands. Conscious that the study of theology had fallen into neglect in the University, they attempted to make provision for it by establishing a house to enable young graduates to pursue their chosen branch of research; and they failed only because Tractarian sympathies had become an obstacle to a young man's advancement in life.

To Newman's personal influence over the University there are many witnesses. We may take two. Dean Lake records that his 'influence, direct and indirect, over nearly all the more thoughtful of the undergraduates . . . was a thing which it is difficult now to describe . . . without either the appearance or the reality of exaggeration.'<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Principal Shairp asserts that only the two extremes of Oxford society, the older dons and the younger undergraduates, remained unaffected, except in so far as the former were moved to opposition, the middle section, consisting of the junior fellows and the senior undergraduates in general, falling under it.<sup>10</sup> However, an American, C. A. Bristed, who spent five years at Cambridge at that time, and afterwards wrote an account of his experiences, *Five Years in a British University*, derived a different impression from a short visit paid to Oxford. He put a question about the Movement to a room full of Christ Church undergraduates, and received the unexpected reply: 'We leave all that to the M.A.'s.'<sup>11</sup> It would not seem that this answer was really representative of University opinion. In what direction Newman exerted the power he wielded, it is hardly necessary to explain here; he certainly never al-

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<sup>9</sup> *Memorials*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy*, p. 241.

<sup>11</sup> p. 182.

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lowed his young followers to be diverted from the object for which they had been sent to the University. An anecdote related by Dean Lake illustrates his attitude towards those men whose studies were disturbed, by a premature and unwholesome interest in the questions brought to the front by the Movement. When told of an over-ardent and zealous Newmanite, popularly reputed to talk of nothing but baptismal regeneration, who had just been plucked in Responsions, he caustically remarked, 'He must go twice round Christ Church meadow on his knees repeating the *As in Praesenti*.'<sup>12</sup>

It is more pertinent to enquire here what those studies were which Oxford imposed upon its members as conditions for its degrees. Sir Henry Acland, one of the early advocates of the teaching of science in the University, stated in a memorandum drawn up by him for Dr. Pusey's biographers, that 'the science studies of the University were from various causes almost extinct . . . . The intellect of the University was wholly given to ecclesiastical and theological questions. All physical science was discountenanced.'<sup>13</sup> That was a serious lacuna. But there were others almost, if not quite, as serious. Owing to a mistaken etymology, it had come to be assumed that a University was an institution in which, according to Dr. Johnson's definition, 'all arts and faculties are taught,' and this may be accepted as the ideal. Now Oxford had preserved, through all the changes and vicissitudes that it had undergone in the course of centuries, the external framework of the medieval university. It still retained in name, if hardly in fact, the three higher faculties of Theology, Law, and Medicine, and the lower faculty of Arts. In fact, however, the higher faculties had only a nominal existence, and may be disregarded, since the University made practically no provision for teaching the subjects that pertained to them, and conferred its degrees in them without much regard to

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<sup>12</sup> *Memorials*, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Henry Acland*, by J. B. Atlay, p. 133.

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the qualifications, or even the competence, of the candidates. The one faculty that really survived was the lower faculty of Arts, and that certainly did not embrace all the subjects that might legitimately be included under it. It is difficult for us to convince ourselves, but none the less essential if we are to understand what Oxford stood for during the first half of last century, that, if we leave Responsions out of account as being merely subsidiary, the Bachelor's degree was conferred on the results of a single examination, in which—and this is the important point—the same subjects were offered by all the candidates, the only difference being that candidates were permitted, if they so wished, to present themselves for 'honours,' which meant a considerably wider range of reading and also a considerably higher standard of attainment than was demanded of candidates for the ordinary examination. This 'Public Examination,' as it was called, embraced three branches:

1. The Rudiments of Religion, which meant the Gospels in Greek, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Evidence of Religion.

2. Literae Humaniores, which included a competent knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy as drawn from Greek and Latin writers, Logic, and Latin composition.

3. The Elements of Mathematics and Physics.

Such a system, however defective in itself, however much it lay open to obvious objections, possessed one enormous advantage over that which has taken its place, in so far as it more directly contributed to form a definite and specific intellectual type on which the University had set its seal; all Oxford men passed through the same mill; and this fact helped to create a certain mental sympathy between them, and to unite them more closely to one another than if their formative years had been spent in the pursuit of different branches of knowledge. So much may be allowed, even though the present system is to be regarded as an inevitable advance and a natural development.

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The principle that all candidates should pursue the same course of studies, and submit to the same tests of proficiency, so far from being novel, was almost coincident with the rise of the University, when the term 'Arts' was employed to denote the seven subjects comprised in the Trivium and Quadrivium, and they were considered to include all that was necessary for education, short of the subjects that fell within the range of one or other of the higher or professional faculties. The specification of the branches of knowledge required, as outlined above, however, went back no further than the beginning of the century when the combined efforts of three men, Eveleigh of Oriel, Parsons of Balliol, and Jackson of Christ Church, stirred the University from its lethargy, and effected a necessary reform. Through their unremitting exertions it was brought about that the Laudian Code, in so far as it regulated the exercises necessary for degrees in Arts, in practice a pretentious anachronism, was swept clear away, and a simpler, and in anticipation a more effective, system substituted. The theoretical basis of the new system, its claim to acceptance in preference to its predecessor, was not elaborated for some years, and then only under the pressure of a controversy initiated by a group of writers in the *Edinburgh Review*, who chose the time when Oxford had taken its own self-reformation in hand as the fitting occasion to launch a determined and sustained attack. The Oxford champions were two in number, Edward Copleston and John Davison, both of Oriel. The controversy, as is usual, ranged over a multiplicity of subjects, but much, though perhaps vital then, now seems quite irrelevant. One remark, however, is in place here: the standpoint adopted by the two Oxford protagonists, and accepted without question by their successors, was that a University primarily existed, not to further the advance of knowledge, not even to equip young men directly and immediately for a professional career, but simply to form an intellectual character in its members. In the debate upon the relative advantages of a 'useful' or of a 'liberal' education, Ox-

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ford took up the cause of the latter, and claimed that it was the supreme end of a University to provide a 'liberal' education. What was meant by this term, may fitly be given in Newman's words: 'This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, it is called Liberal Education.'<sup>14</sup>

This they came to regard at Oxford as the ideal that Oxford had set before itself through the centuries. In 1830 when various modifications of the Examination Statute were under discussion, Newman expressed his fear that, in certain circumstances, examiners would be appointed 'likely to make great innovations, losing sight completely of those old principles which . . . the Provost had kept in view.'<sup>15</sup> Chief among 'those old principles' was the principle that mathematics should be studied at the University, not as a branch of science, but as an element in a liberal education. On this occasion a paper of questions was circulated among the College Tutors by a committee appointed by the Heads of Houses, and Newman, being still in name a Tutor of Oriel, was asked to express his opinion. His attitude towards the important question at issue, is revealed in his answers which he transcribed in 1851, when he was engaged in writing *The Idea of a University*, and to which he added a note in 1874, 'I am not sure that this paper is not worth keeping, though I have not the means of judging that it is.' The answer which is pertinent here, runs as follows: 'At present the mathematical classification is in practice quite different from the classification in Litt. Humaniores; it is in fact an order of individual merit. This is an anomaly. The framers of the original Statute wisely regarded mathematics as an instrument of mental culture; and had appointed the same ex-

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<sup>14</sup> *Idea of a University*, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> *Letters and Correspondence*, 1, p. 220.

amination and examiners for both mathematics and classics. Could we possibly return to the old system by changing the title from 'In Disciplinis Mathematicis et Physicis' to 'In Geometria Veterum,' (*i.e.* Euclid, Newton, etc.), rewarding mathematical proficiency, as such, by one or more prizes or scholarships distinct from the Schools? Froude's view on the same subject, which coincides with that of Newman, is given in a paper, published in his *Remains*.<sup>16</sup> It is worthy of notice that he considered academical distinctions to serve two ends, the direction of education and the advancement of knowledge; and that he thought the former to be the scope of 'the honours of the Schools,' whereas the latter was to be encouraged by the award of prizes and scholarships for proficiency in certain specified subjects.

Mark Pattison, who fought strenuously by pen and voice to make Oxford realise the true idea of a University, as he conceived it, seems to have been well acquainted with, and to have drawn much of his inspiration from Newman's Dublin Discourses. In his *Memoirs* he remarks that 'if there were anyone in the whole of Oxford, who could be supposed capable of attaining to a complete conception of what instruction ought to be, it was the author, of those Discourses, and questions whether he, in his Oxford days, ever approached the 'magnificent ideal of a national institute, embracing and representing all knowledge, and making this knowledge its own end.'<sup>17</sup> It is practically certain that he did not. That conception came with the wisdom of riper years, and there is little doubt that Sir William Hamilton's articles<sup>18</sup> in the *Edinburgh Review* planted the first seed of it in his mind.

Although it is by all means to be conceded that the man who has passed through Oxford should be, in the words of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'remarkable less for something

<sup>16</sup> II, p. 325-334.

<sup>17</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Collected in his *Discussions on Philosophy*, etc.



he can take out of his wallet and exhibit for knowledge, than for *being* something, and that 'something' a man of unmistakable intellectual breeding, whose trained judgment we can trust to choose the better and reject the worse,<sup>19</sup> yet it must also be allowed that Newman's view of knowledge as instrumental in education prevented him from grasping to the full that knowledge in itself has certain claims, apart from its educational value, and that a University exists, if not to promote the advance of knowledge, although this is a precarious position to take up, certainly to transmit to the future the accumulated knowledge of the past. Canon Oakeley, once a Fellow of Balliol, after his conversion had a certain experience of Catholic education, and the contrast he draws between it and the Oxford ideal of his time will serve to illustrate the essential characteristic of the latter. 'The difference,' he says, 'between the existing English Catholic idea of education and that to which we were accustomed at Oxford is . . . a fundamental one; the one making the formation of (mental) *character* its great aim, the other the storing of the mind with a certain amount of valuable facts. Hence *our* acquirements seem to Catholics 'limited,' and *their* intellectual character and habits seem to us shallow and desultory. *We* used to aim at knowing one or two things well, *they* aim at knowing many things respectably. 'Non omnia possumus omnes,' was our motto; they look less to the utilisation of particular *fortes*, and deal with men more *en masse*. This difference is a very radical one, and extends to other things. It is the fault of us Catholics, I think, to make too little allowance for the distinctions of individual character, both moral and intellectual; it was the fault of Oxford that the range of intellectual pursuits was, as a general rule, far too narrow.'<sup>20</sup>

It must also be remembered that the Tractarians had been College Tutors, and possessed the outlook of College

<sup>19</sup> *On the Art of Writing*, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Rambler*, Jan. 1849, p. p. 373.

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Tutors. Oxford was profoundly ignorant of its own history. For two centuries the Colleges had usurped the functions of the University, and the University had surrendered into their hands its duties as a teaching body. It was only a shadow of its former self. To the Tractarians their College, not the University, it was that mattered most. But they hardly knew how each College had come to be what it was, a tiny University, or rather a school for young men too old for school, self-contained and self-sufficient, providing from its own resources within its own walls all the instruction that its junior members ever received. The Tractarians were vehement advocates of the tutorial system, first developed at Oriel as an effective educational agency at the beginning of the century, and soon adopted by Balliol, and afterwards by the other Colleges.

But the reason for their preference of the tutorial system over the professorial was not entirely intellectual. The University had duties towards its junior members other than intellectual, and these, they held, it discharged through the Colleges, and the Colleges through the Tutors. There was, according to Newman, a standing difference of opinion among religious men whether or not a tutorship was compatible with the vow taken at ordination. The general consensus of opinion tended towards the view that it was fundamentally incompatible, and only tolerable in certain circumstances and for a time. Newman himself, however, took the line that the tutorial office was one of the various modes in which the vow could be fulfilled, and maintained that it would have been the greatest of inconsistencies in him to consider that office as merely secular. Newman dwelt on this topic fifty years later, when he replied to the congratulatory address from the Catholic Poor School Committee. 'When I was Public Tutor of my College at Oxford,' he recalled on that occasion, 'I maintained, even fiercely, that my employment was distinctly pastoral. I considered that, by the Statutes of the University, a Tutor's profession was of a religious nature. I never would allow that, in teaching the classics, I was absolved from

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carrying on, by means of them, in the minds of my pupils, an ethical training. I considered a College Tutor to have the care of souls, and before I accepted the office I wrote down a private memorandum, that, supposing I could not carry out this view of it, the question would arise whether I could continue to hold it. To this principle I have been faithful through my life.' If we grasp this, we can understand more completely what he implied when he spoke of Oxford as 'the most religious University in the world,'<sup>21</sup> and we can regard with more sympathy than perhaps otherwise we should do, the Tractarian attempts, successful for the time being, to keep Oxford as a close preserve of Anglicanism.

When Newman was engaged in the composition of his Dublin Discourses, he determined 'very deliberately and with good reasons' to take Oxford as his point of departure; and wrote to tell Robert Ornsby what his intentions were. The latter, formerly Fellow of Trinity, concurred; and writing to express his agreement, brought out the two ideas, about which this somewhat discursive paper revolves. He gave two reasons for his view that Oxford might well be held up as the model, notwithstanding its deficiencies, which a Catholic University should seek to emulate. These were, put briefly:

1. Catholic colleges in the British Isles, as on the continent, tended to yield to the popular clamour for useful knowledge, whereas Oxford still maintained the true view of education as a mental discipline that found its end in the formation of intellectual character.

2. Oxford was loyal to the principle of giving a religious colouring to all studies and of influencing all knowledge by faith, whereas the medieval conception of a University, as a *studium generale* under the patronage of the Church, had been completely swept away on the continent by the revolutionary movement.

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<sup>21</sup> *Essays*, II, 409.

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The views which had been formulated at Oxford in the stress of controversy, Newman said at Dublin, had grown into his whole system of thought, and become part of himself.<sup>22</sup> The Tractarian converts would one and all have subscribed to this statement as an expression of their own attitude. When they came into the Church, and explored their new surroundings, they found, of course, that the due place of religion in education was fully recognised, even taken for granted in a way in which it had not been even at Oxford. But they also found that the educational system pursued in the Catholic colleges, if not based on a different theory, was in its practical results opposed to the one to which they had been accustomed, and that the standard of achievement fell considerably below what it ought to have been. They did not altogether realise the disabilities under which Catholics had laboured for centuries. Hence there were mutual criticisms and mutual misunderstandings; and the question of education became the thorny subject of debate in the fifties. Eventually, however, old Catholics and Tractarian converts came to understand that the criticisms on one side and the other had a basis of truth; and each party consented to learn from the other, to the mutual advantage of both.

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<sup>22</sup> *Idea of a University*, p. 4.