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978-1-108-00052-9 - Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century

Christopher Wordsworth

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTORY.

AFTER laying down such a book as Izaak Walton's *Memoirs of George Herbert* or Bishop Monk's *Life of Bentley*, we naturally put to ourselves the question: whether, if we had our choice, we should prefer the times in which either of them lived to our own days.

Such a comparison is not unprofitable as an exercise of the Affections or the Imagination; but it has a distinct value with reference to our own Conduct and Opinions at the present time.

It is true, no doubt, that most of us are inclined to dwell with pleasure upon the lively Chronicles of the post-Elizabethan Age; and to recoil from the deathlike Effigies of the Eighteenth Century, when the Spirit of Chivalry seems dead, and the Christian Life paralysed and obscured. And in our days, when men's minds are fixed upon the Present almost to the exclusion of what is Past or Future from the range of their view, we can hardly do wrong in encouraging in ourselves and others the Contemplation of the Seventeenth Century, and of still remoter times.

Nevertheless the student of history must not neglect those periods which *seem* to him uninteresting. *Without interest* no period of history can ever be in its relation to that which has followed it or is to

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follow; since the darkest and even the blankest pages of history can never be blotted out or removed without destroying the Unity and Continuity of the whole. The sons cannot wholly do the fathers' work: much less can they undo it;—even though that work be Idleness.

And if this be true of the study of Ecclesiastical History (as Professor *Westcott* teaches us), it is a principle no less to be observed in reviewing that most important section of the great educational question of the day; the Condition and Proper Destiny of our Universities.

In examining the pile of different parts which compose the architectural whole of the University Structure, we must not be content with fixing our eyes upon the point towards which the lines converge (a point still enveloped in the dim mysterious distance), nor yet with taking a bird's-eye view from the high places of Philosophy.

despicere unde queas alios, passimque uidere
errare atque uiam palantis quaerere uitae,
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
noctis atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.

In addition to these, and in order to complete our fore-shortened sketch of past and present, there is need to make, at intervals in the length, Transverse Sections from which to gather the general condition of the Societies in each stage of their development. In a word, we must contemplate the parts in their Solidarity as well as in their Continuity.

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Any attempt to take such a view of the condition of our Universities in the Eighteenth Century, must, except in the hands of the practised Historian, be at present partial and of doubtful success. The Life of that Age is not as yet consolidated into History; and for that reason there will be gaps and doubtful tints in our Chart of the Section.

At present we must content ourselves with hoping that the day will soon come when some diligent Lover of Truth will piece together the later history of our Universities from the Pamphlets of a Pamphleteering Age.

Such a work would be unquestionably a most important assistance in grappling with difficulties which now beset us. It would, I believe, enable us to see in many cases the causes of neglect from which Disease moral, religious, and political has spread in our great educational bodies, and so, since the importance of the Universities has increased,

in patriam populumque fluxit.

At the same time we should, I believe, learn to our profit that, whereas we are apt to boast of our Advancement and to despise our forefathers in the last century, many (if not most) of those Educational and Constitutional Movements in which the Party of Progress in our Universities are now most interested, had been suggested or elaborated by persons or by important minorities long before we ourselves were born.

Such a *history* is however beyond the scope of the following compilation.

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The Method proposed is to take the different topics severally which relate to the *University Life and Studies in England during the Eighteenth Century* under these three heads :

1. SOCIAL LIFE. This division contains remarks upon the Political and Moral Condition of the Universities; the Mutual Relations of different classes of their members; the Amusements, the Discipline; with some account of Proposals for Reform put forward at the time.

This part only has been completed in the present volume. The Elements of the two following are already *in solution* in my Note Books, but are not as yet *precipitated* upon Paper as Copy for the Press.

2. The INDIVIDUAL STUDIES pursued in the University Curriculum, or advanced by the efforts of private Students: the Tools and Helps afforded them, or needed by them, as Libraries, Editions, Scientific Apparatus, and Laboratories. This division of the sketch should treat of some of that second class of Instruments to the advancement of learning mentioned by Bacon at the commencement of the second book '*de augmentis scientiarum*;' while the first division is devoted to the Workshop and the Men ('*litterarum sedes*'—'*personae eruditorum*') in their relation to the common weal.

As an appendage to the Studies, should follow some account of the proceeding to Degrees, and of the early University Calendars.

3. The RELIGIOUS LIFE in its personal and social aspects.

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PART I.

SOCIAL LIFE.

King George observing with judicious eyes
 The state of both his Universities,
 To Oxford sent a troop of horse; and why?
 That learned body wanted loyalty.
 To Cambridge books he sent, as well discerning
 How much that loyal body wanted learning.

The King to Oxford sent a troop of horse,
 For Tories own no argument but force;
 With equal skill to Cambridge books he sent,
 For Whigs admit no force but argument.

‘EVERYTHING’—says Hartley Coleridge¹, in his *Life of Dr Richard Bentley*—‘everything in England takes the shape and hue of politics.’ If this was true of the country in the earlier half of the present century, it was so pre-eminently at the Universities in the Eighteenth.

The Civil War in the days of King Charles I. had spread so widely over the country that it was almost impossible for any man, much more for any woman, to abstain from espousing earnestly that cause which appeared to have the better claim to advantage or to right. And if the horrors of civil broils and the sour tyranny of a body more imperious than one man could be, made many no longer unwilling to welcome

¹ *Northern Worthies*, p. 151.

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back the exiled Prince ; yet, after the disturbing influences of a luxurious reign, the infatuation of King James roused the dormant indignation of his subjects; the succession, which by a prudent and a sober king might have been established to the welfare of the nation, was violently interrupted, and England was once more the scene of faction and distress.

It would perhaps have been difficult to augur on which side the sister Universities would place themselves. Many Colleges in each had given their plate and their men to further the good cause. The words of Dr Bliss¹ will apply to Cambridge, as well as to Oxford, of which he is writing; witness the pages of Mercurius Rusticus, and the acts of the Earl of Manchester.

‘They had been despoiled of their property, ejected from their livings and subjected to every injury and insult at the hands of a rabble who thought themselves reformers, but had no other aim than their own advancement and the plunder of those which had anything to lose. Can we wonder at the popularity with which Charles II. ascended his father’s throne, or be surprised that Hearne and those who thought with him still adhered in the following reign to the race of the Stuarts?’ They had suffered for the king and they had suffered with him. Was not that enough to make them faithful? For the loyalty of benefactors is most loyal; they engender affection, the offspring of adoptive parents. But the second Charles in the gaiety of the court often played the

¹ *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, III. Appendix I. pp. 188, 189.

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part of Pharaoh's chief butler to those who had restored him to his liberty, and to his office. Such conduct would make some bitter enemies:—others (like the dog who does not hate his master for the blow or cruel word) would increase in loyalty; their sense of duty and of chivalry becoming stronger with their sense of the difficulty of maintaining them.

Then came the trial of conscience. King James in his ardour for Romanism, and urged on perhaps by a suspicion that he had but little time wherein to advance his cause, by attempts to an exertion of arbitrary power in either University struck with his own hand two fatal blows to the security of his throne¹.

At Oxford upon the death of Dr Clarke in 1687 a mandamus was received from the king by the Fellows of Magdalene College to elect Mr Anthony Farmer, a man of no good character and a Papist, to the vacant Presidency. But the Fellows of Magdalene stood firm. They proceeded statutely to elect Dr Hough—who (as we learn from Hearne's diary²) only agreed to hold the Presidency against the king's mandamus when Dr Baptiste Levinz, bishop of Man, withdrew. The Fellows were summoned to Whitehall. James could no longer insist upon the election of one of such notoriety as his nominee; he therefore issued

¹ Burnet's *Own Time*, III. 139, ed. Oxon. 1823 (= I. 697, *sqq.* folio ed.). On the great influence of the Universities in the country, at the end of the 17th cent., see Macaulay's *Hist.* ch. viii.

² *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, III. 167.

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another mandamus for the election of Dr Parker. But the king had shewn his weakness, and the Fellows knew their strength lay in doing their duty.

They bore the unkingly conduct of their sovereign, who came to Christ Church Hall and rated them in person. Dr Hough was deprived, and the door of his presidential lodgings broken open by the servants of the Commission: for no Oxford blacksmith could be induced to do the deed. Twenty-five Fellows were expelled and most of the Demies followed their example. The college servants also suffered and acted boldly for their masters.

'Already' (writes Lord Macaulay of the year 1687) 'had University College been turned by Obadiah Walker into a Roman Catholic seminary. Already Christ Church was governed by a Roman Catholic Dean. Mass was already said in both those Colleges. The tranquil and majestic city, so long the stronghold of monarchical principles, was agitated by passions which it had never before known. The undergraduates, with the connivance of those who were in authority over them, hooted the members of Walker's¹ congregation and chanted satirical ditties under his windows. Some fragments of the serenades which then disturbed the High Street have been preserved. The burden of one ballad ran thus:—

"Old Obadiah sings Ave Maria."

¹ For an anecdote relating to Obadiah Walker, see the quotation from Cibber's *Life* given below. His name is still commemorated in an

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‘So mutinous indeed was the temper of the University that one of the newly-raised regiments—the same which is now called the Second Dragoon Guards, was quartered at Oxford for the purpose of preventing an outbreak. As a necessary consequence of James’s arbitrary proceedings, when in 1688 the insurgents under Lovelace appeared before Oxford, they were received with a hearty welcome. Already some of the heads of the University had dispatched one of their number to assure the Prince of Orange that they espoused his cause, and would willingly coin their plate for his service. The Whig chief therefore rode through the capital of Toryism amidst general acclamation, and at the head of a long procession of horse and foot¹.’

Yet the Jesuits had made some way at Oxford, whether by deluding the conscience of the famous Quaker William Penn, or through the pervert Master of University, Obadiah Walker, who had a press in the College for printing unlicensed books².

Oxford had at this critical time a Vice-Chancellor (Dr Gilbert Ironside of Wadham) worthy of the men of

‘Maudlin, Magdalen, or Magdalene.’

He could answer the king with dignity, yet without for-

admonition to pass the wine, which is, I am told, traditional in *the Club* at Oxford—a Society founded in the 18th century.

‘Obadiah Walker us’d to say,

“If *you* don’t drink, your neighbour *may*.”’

¹ Macaulay’s *Hist.*, compare Burnet’s *Own Time*, III. 321, 331 = folio ed. I. 793, 798.

² Cp. the passage from Cibber’s *Life* quoted below. Dr Sykes’ *Letters to Dr Charlett of Univ. Coll. in 1687. Letters from the Bodleian* (1813), Vol. I. No. xvi. foll.

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getting the obedience which he owed to the royal command in all things lawful¹. It was he who prudently answered a captious question put to him by one who was sent to test the willingness of the University to confer the degrees of D.D. and LL.B. on persons nominated by the king².

Our Cambridge also had brooked the royal displeasure by withstanding an attempt to set aside her laws, when the king would have forced her to admit Alban Francis, a Benedictine monk, to the Degree of M.A. without his taking the oaths³. The Vice-Chancellor (Dr Peachell) was deposed, but still the University persisted, and Father Francis was rejected. And for king James himself, 'it is not too much' (says the now Master of Jesus College Cambridge) 'to say that the following out of those designs cost him his throne⁴.'

¹ *Letters from the Bodleian*, I. pp. 35, 36.

² In 1711 (Nov. 19) there came a mandate from Queen Anne 'to make Mr Nicholas Sanderson (a blind man from his infancy, but who had taught Mathematicks in Christ's College about 4 years) Master of Arts. It did not command, but only recommended him; and yet he was immediately admitted and created without reading any grace for it. 20. He was chosen Mathematick Professor in the room of Mr Whiston, who was expell'd for Heresy.' *Diary of Edw. Rud.*, p. 7. Camb. 1860, ed. Rev. H. R. Luard.

³ See a Pamphlet in the Bodleian Library (Gough, Camb. 103). 'The Cambridge Case, being an exact narrative of all the Proceedings against the Vice-Chancellor and Delegates of that University, for refusing to admit *Alban Francis* a Benedictine Monk to the Degree of Master of Arts, without taking the Oaths. London, Printed and are to be Sold by *Randal Taylor* near *Stationers' Hall*. 1689.' (pp. 16.)

⁴ *Brief Historical notices of the interference of the Crown with the affairs of the English Universities*, by G. Elwes Corrie, B.D., Fellow and Tutor of St Catharine's Hall, and Norrisian Professor, Cambridge, 1839. p. 85.