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The Universities

THE UNIVERSITIES are in politics whether or not they like it. For years no one has disturbed them—the last Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge was forty years ago. M.P.s who have tried to investigate through the Public Accounts Committee how the University Grants Committee spends its grant have been foiled by Treasury officials who blandly state that it would not be in the public interest to reveal any details. Thus the U.G.C. has been able to spend public money yet not suffer political interference—a solution which some other countries regard as another manifestation of British political genius. But just as the U.G.C. was not controlled by the Government so the universities were not controlled by the U.G.C. It was a tiny department that allocated funds and left the universities to plan their own development. After the post-war bulge of ex-servicemen had passed through them they heaved a sigh of relief, and the U.G.C., which had sanctioned the founding of one new university at Keele, announced that a period of “consolidation” had arrived. The universities were not expected to expand. These were the days when an influential woman don at Cambridge could argue that to found a third women’s college was absurd as there were “not enough able girls to fill it.” Even as late as 1958 the highest of pundits declared that only a “small reservoir” of potential university entrants existed while only two-and-a-half years ago a pundit of a different age group, Mr. Kingsley Amis, warned us that More Means Worse [ENCOUNTER, June, 1960].

And then suddenly public opinion changed. Overnight a vast army of potential students was discovered. As the bulge entered the grammar schools, more boys and girls stayed on in the Sixth Forms and applied for the free

university education that they could now get. At the universities the more were found to be much the same. The U.G.C. changed gear and made plans for seven universities. The civic universities (with the exception of Keele) became eager to expand. Everyone began to bandy about the fact that only 4 per cent of adolescents would go to a university by 1969. A Fabian group calculated that there would then be 212,000 fewer places in higher education than were needed, and that by 1979 the short-fall would be nearly half a million. Then Sir Geoffrey Crowther weighed in. He had alluded in his Report to the harm that was done to sixth form education by excessive specialisation forced on the schools by the pressure to pass the departmental requirements laid down by universities. He now passed to a swingeing attack on the universities for neglecting their duty to teach (as well as research) and suggested that they could teach many more students especially if they would use their plant—laboratories and lecture rooms—in a less frivolous manner. People began to talk of the need to think less in terms of an intellectual élite and more in terms of producing a broad upper echelon of intelligence—qualified men and women trained in skills appropriate to post-war society.

Now, IT IS TRUE that some of those who contrasted the figure of 4 per cent with that of 30 per cent in America forgot that a more important figure is that of the number of students who stay the course and graduate; and that wastage in British universities is markedly less than, say, at the Sorbonne. It is also true that they ignored the quite separate structure of higher education under the Ministry of Education—Colleges of Advanced Technology, Technical Colleges, Teachers’ Training Colleges, and professional

institutes, which add considerably to the numbers of those receiving education after the age of eighteen and which bring the total to about 8-10 per cent. When at last the intelligentsia and the universities deigned to notice that these institutions existed they were faced with a new set of awkward questions.

Why, asked Crowther and Sir Eric Ashby, was so much care taken to brand these institutions as grossly inferior to universities? Why were they permitted to issue only diplomas and not confer degrees? Was there not a built-in snobbery in higher education which was as pernicious as that which exists in our secondary education? What was more, were these institutions doing anything in teaching markedly inferior to what universities did?—perhaps indeed the highly specialised courses under the thumb of university faculties and departments were not as surpassingly excellent and as appropriate as the dons themselves liked to believe?

Meanwhile the civil service began to show signs of rebellion. The Treasury discovered that it was violating its own principles. Its duty is to scrutinise expenditure, not to become a spending department like any other ministry: yet here it was disbursing to the universities not the two millions of forty years ago but fifty-four millions a year. In the last two years, therefore, the universities have found themselves regarded to their astonishment as part, and only a part, of a system of higher education. They are under scrutiny. The daily and weekly press teems with articles. The U.G.C. has set up the Hale Committee to look into their teaching methods. The Prime Minister has set up the Robbins Committee to survey the whole field of higher education. The examiners are themselves being examined.

AT THIS POINT in time, therefore, Professor Herbert Butterfield's Lindsay Memorial Lectures on *The Universities and Education To-day* should be particularly interesting.¹ He began by telling how a professor at Keele suggested that he might like to take the chance of delivering some home-truths at the end of his two-year tenure as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge. "There was a twinkle in his eye to indicate that...here was an unusual opportunity for letting some cats out of the bag"—

an opportunity which a permanent Vice-Chancellor in a civic university never enjoys. The twinkle in Butterfield's eye as he spoke these words must have been blinding. The students at Keele got no sign or smell of a cat. What they did get were pages of mellow wisdom and a remarkable example of the adversitive style.

The classic use of the adversitive style is said to occur on a tombstone in Northumberland where a family, scorning the falsehoods of lapidary inscriptions, wrote:

She was temperate, chaste, and charitable, but she was proud, peevish, and passionate. She was an affectionate wife and a tender mother but her husband and child seldom saw her countenance without a disgusting frown. . . .

A dozen elegant antitheses follow.

In these lectures assertions are similarly followed a few pages later by counter-assertions. Universities exist to serve society *but* they must search for truth independent of any immediate utilitarian end. The State has a right to intervene *but* the autonomy of universities must be preserved. More students should enjoy higher education *but* universities must not grow too large. New subjects must be capable of being introduced into the curriculum *but* simply to add them will not radically change our experience. In the great period of Dutch and German universities two centuries ago professors were saved from narrow-mindedness by being closely related to public life, *but* professors at the heart of government are dangerous. Research students should be given greater attention *but* undergraduates should not be neglected for their sake. Specialisation ensures that students shall be trained in techniques and those deeper kinds of analysis that give structure to knowledge, *but* learning a technique can be so stultifying that we need to invent a technique of not being technical. Specialisation has been caused by the pressure of exams and by universities failing to devise tests to expose the crammed, *but* it is not in itself evil—the evil lies in the narrowness with which it is handled. Specialists should not push their own subject *but* history offers a unique insight into the humanities, *though* English literature might be more important; *but* we must recall that there is no short-cut to a humanist education. Sociology, like education, is now no longer a dirty word in universities *but* "a recent critic of the historiography of the Mongols" observed that Gibbon might not have

¹ London (1962). Routledge & Kegan Paul, 12s. 6d.

written so freshly had he been constrained by established lines of thought. (Had the critic considered how far the rules of rhetoric constrained the imagination of Elizabethan poets?) Certainly men may train for professions at the university *but* technologists should not be admitted simply because they argue that they would gain much by being permitted to be there. And so on.

THESE SCRUPULOUS HESITATIONS are the product of Butterfield's sense of the complexity of history which is the most powerful determinant of his long and passionate study of the subject. But concealed in their folds you suddenly see something stirring in the bag that looks astonishingly like a cat. It is an appeal to the academic profession to resist pressure to increase the number of university students quickly because haste is the most pernicious danger in education, and therefore we must not "attempt to find too swift an adjustment of means to ends." It is an appeal to resist the introduction of studies that "reflect current ideas or popular desires . . . and sacrifice long-term values." In just such a mood Burke wrote his famous defence of the unreformed House of Commons. "Our representation is as nearly perfect as the necessary imperfection of human affairs and of human creatures will suffer it to be; it is a subject of prudent and honest use . . . and not of captious criticism and rash experiment." And in remembering that passage one also remembers G. M. Young's dry comment on it: "Is there no such thing as honest criticism and prudent experiment?"—is it not possible for a "current idea" to contain "long-term value"?²

These lectures may be innocent because, as always in Butterfield's writing, there are many layers of inference and, as he has recently told us, many "trip-wires" deliberately planted in order to make critics fall flat on their faces. But it is difficult not to take them as a sighting shot upon the Robbins Committee. The adversitive style suggests a line of defence. If history teaches us how complex all problems are, whatever direction the Robbins Committee suggests higher education should take is most likely to be wrong. "Ah!" lamented a junior minister

the other day, "you don't know how terrible it is to have been taught by Herbert. One learnt that any reform would certainly produce unpredictable consequences, quite often the very contrary of those which it was intended to effect." These lectures embody the politics of inaction.

THEY ARE NOT necessarily the politics of reaction. There are, of course, die-hards in all universities: professors in civic universities unable to contemplate any diminution of their powers over their departments or in the Senate, dons at Oxbridge rigid with piety towards the past and embalmed in college rituals all of which seem to them vital to retain.

But the majority of dons are as ready for change to-day as they were over a hundred years ago. It is an error to suppose that the dons between 1830–50 blindly opposed reform and had to be forced to kiss the rod of the Royal and Statutory Commissioners in the 'fifties. Strenuous reform at Cambridge had been going on for two decades, and among the progressive party could be found Heads of Houses such as Philpott and Whewell who cleared away a good deal of lumber. Nor was it true that they were oblivious of the duty that universities owed to society. But even so, the ancient universities could not reform themselves without major intervention by the State. Why? Because various educational ideals conflicted with each other. It was difficult to reform the examination system because it depended on the teaching of college tutors who were set in their ways and few in number. It was difficult to censure absentee professors when they could not get an audience for their lectures—undergraduates, then as now, being reluctant to attend courses on which they would not be examined. It was difficult to raise the standard of the pass degree because this would encourage cramming which all deplored. It was difficult to institute an entrance exam because poor men whose parents had been unable to afford to give them a good education would not be able to pass it. It was difficult to introduce new subjects because, compared to mathematics, they lacked precision and provoked controversy. It was difficult to abolish life fellowships—for without security of tenure who would be willing to settle down to teach?

The way out of the maze was made yet harder by the fact that the dons then were—as men in every generation are—the prisoners of the tacit assumptions of their age. Most dons

²Most of the proposals for change in higher education are meant to reinforce long-term values. You can, of course, write off research into computers and teaching students how to programme as mere fashion; those who think these activities worth doing believe, however, that major intellectual changes are going to result from them.

then believed that the health of the country depended on the strength of "our happy Establishment in Church and State." Toleration might demand that Dissenters should be permitted to set up their own private colleges and schools, but the two ancient universities of the nation must remain Anglican because they existed primarily to ensure that there should never be lacking men who would be of service to Church and State. Undergraduate education was, therefore, all important and the duty to research residual. Immense respect, moreover, was paid to legal obligations and to property. The Common Law stood as a bulwark against arbitrary interference with property and a life fellowship was regarded as a piece of property won in fair competition. Thus colleges which welcomed reform had often to wait for a quarter-of-a-century for many of the reforms to become effective because the respect for legal rights was so great that absentee or useless Fellows could not be dispossessed.

BY THE END of the 19th century such assumptions seemed arbitrary and quaint. Victorian reform had dissolved them. But the reform movement of that time engendered a new set of assumptions. Many of these imprison our own minds to-day. Academic freedom and self-government seem self-evidently good. The obligation on dons to research is unquestioned. So is the division of universities into faculties and departments each offering specialist courses to students. The Honours B.A. degree then became all-important and is still jealously guarded: all the teaching resources were lavished on undergraduates and few funds were available for post-graduates. New universities were not allowed to experiment. They had to submit to tutelage and prove their respectability—Leicester, for instance, had long to submit to the examination system of London. The civic universities gave a professional qualification for those in a lower social stratum. Springing out of 19th-century industrialism and provincialism they challenged metropolitan aristocratic English culture; but they were too small in size and lacking in funds to disturb the superior status of London or the old Scottish universities, still less of Oxford and Cambridge.

The ancient universities educated those who by birth were destined to rule or who by ability made good their claim to join the governing classes. They taught a small élite which dominated the political and professional life of the

country by providing it with many of its leaders. This élite consisted of the sons of the upper and upper-middle classes plus those who had fought their way up the ladder of the State school system—and whose parents could scrape together enough money to supplement their sons' scholarships. Some expected to sit in Parliament or in City boardrooms. Most were expected to enter the professions—to become diplomats, priests, lawyers, and doctors, to pass into the Civil Service or govern the colonies, to emerge as dons or schoolmasters. Some went into industry with degrees in science and engineering. Some were later to staff the new cultural bureaucracy of the B.B.C. and the Arts Council. An increasing number stayed on to do research but the number was still small.

It was also a cardinal assumption that the very clever and the very stupid ought to live side by side. They were believed to educate each other. For the clever and ambitious to get a First—as those who study *Times* obituaries will have noticed—was a permanent hall-mark for life: to miss a First, something which had to be explained away. But no sort of stigma attached to the average, the lazy, or the stupid: their passport could be stamped with a Blue or by making their mark in the Union or in university clubs.

A golden mystique settled upon undergraduate life at the ancient universities. These were the years when you grew up; this was when you learnt how to get on with all sorts and conditions of men; here the aesthetes threw off the burden of public school philistinism, and the hearties could play while being insensibly civilised. It was the life of "laughter and the love of friends."

THERE IS LESS LAUGHTER to-day. The pressure for places at all universities is too keen. Dons know well that those days are past. For instance, the proportion of university students at Oxbridge is diminishing. In 1938, a quarter of the graduates in England and Wales graduated from Oxbridge, whereas by 1970 only one-fifteenth will graduate there. The civic universities are no longer provincial. In 1908, 78 per cent of the students at Leeds came from within thirty miles, in 1955 only 40 per cent were local. Yet when faced with the new situation that has arisen with the increase of potential students or with a variety of other problems, e.g., the cost of scientific research and the shortage of certain teachers, dons become imprisoned in the academic structure that they

have inherited because they still partly apply the assumptions of an age that is disappearing, just as did their predecessors in early Victorian days.

The same arguments that were used then are used to-day. When someone suggests that on some issues a solution will have to be imposed upon the universities—or upon colleges and departments within a university—if they cannot themselves agree, the cry of “Academic Freedom” is raised. And the changes themselves are challenged by appealing to another criterion—the Idea of a University. Anything, so it is argued, that tends to destroy the *essential character* of the university must be resisted; and as, in education, practically all change involves relinquishing something that was, and very probably is still, valuable, the onus of proof on those who hold that changes must come to establish something *more* valuable is crushing.

There is a further line of defence, linking these two bastions. It is designed to halt the advance of the administrator. Butterfield is nowhere more telling than when he points out the failings of the administrative mind which thinks in terms of teaching load, professorial spread, bench space and building user and which forgets the focus of all education—the personal impact of the teacher upon his students. He is very right. All discussion of education focuses here. How can pupils be taught to use their own minds and develop originality? How can they be persuaded to renounce cramming and question-spotting? How can all those who govern schools, colleges, and universities be made to acknowledge that examination results are not an end but a comparatively unimportant by-product of education? How can students be persuaded to love learning for its own sake and not for the job that getting a degree may obtain for them? In the most important sense discussion of education is fruitless: fruitless because all the arrangements (that are the subject-matter of such discussion) are so often nullified at the one point to which the arrangements are directed—that is, the meeting of the minds of pupil and teacher where the intellect is trained.

The intellect... the intellect... the intellect. *That* is what universities exist for. Everything else is secondary. Equality of opportunity to come to the university is secondary. The need to mix classes, nationalities, and races together is secondary. The agonies and gaieties of student life are secondary. So are the rules, customs, pay, and promotion of the academic staff and

their debates on changing the curricula or procuring facilities for research. Even the awakening of a sense of beauty or the life-giving shock of new experience, or the pursuit of goodness itself—all these are secondary to the cultivation, training, and exercise of the intellect. Universities should hold up for admiration the intellectual life. The most precious gift they have to offer is to live and work among books or in laboratories and to enable the young to see those rare scholars who have put on one side the world of material success, both in and outside the university, in order to study with single-minded devotion some topic because that above all seems important to them. A university is dead if the dons cannot in some way communicate to the students the struggle—and the disappointments as well as the triumphs in that struggle—to produce out of the chaos of human experience some grain of order won by the intellect. That is the end to which all the arrangements of the university should be directed. And it is because so often the administration of the university seems to be, and at times is, directed towards the achievement of secondary aims—the secondary goals which the different departments and groups and interests within the university set up—that the hackles of the dons rise.

So when Butterfield tells us to stand against creeping bureaucracy he is nicking a sensitive nerve. It would have been a fine stroke if he had here been able to push his argument further and lay the failings in university education at the door of a body of powerful university administrators engaged in frustrating the ideals of the dons. Unfortunately he has to admit that, as in Britain (unlike America) the dons administer themselves, it is those who teach and research themselves that are betraying education. Still, the needle has been insinuated and the notion that education and research are being sacrificed for the convenience of administrators is comforting and well calculated to rally opinion in defence of academic freedom.

YET IF WE LOOK BACK once more at the age of Victorian reform we see how again and again reform arose out of administrative enquiries undertaken to resolve situations which the public—or at any rate the clerisy—could no longer endure. They were far less the brain-children of Benthamites or of men working under the spell of seers such as Carlyle or Ruskin than of civil servants, public officials, philanthropists, and politicians trying to resolve log-jams

that were endangering society. Whether we like it or not the problems that universities face to-day have to be expressed in administrative terms; and the longer we look at them the more they seem to spring from terrible administrative defects. They are defects which are defended by citing axioms that are no longer axiomatic.

IT IS AN AXIOM that universities should have complete control over the admission of students. It is for them to choose to admit this student rather than that and to decree what academic standard he must obtain as a condition of entry. As the universities are attached to no administrative structure below them, they operate as if the Ministry of Education, the headmasters' conferences and associations, the associations of "subject" masters, and other institutions of higher education did not exist. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors offers its opinion that two A Levels and *Use of English* at A Level ought to be regarded as a minimum requirement for entry to a university. The Secondary Schools Examination Council (which loosely co-ordinates the various independent examining boards of G.C.E. which are in turn vestigially controlled by the universities they represent) thinks that two A Levels *tout court* should be a sufficient qualification. There is no machinery for bringing the Vice-Chancellors and S.S.E.C. together, nor for working out an agreed scheme with the headmasters of the Headmasters' Conference or the Incorporated Association of Head Masters.

Even if an agreed scheme were worked out, the massed dons of Oxbridge would most probably vote it down. Even more ludicrous, the agreed scheme would be at once nullified in every university. For in fact it is not university entrance requirements which bedevil the curricula of the schools. It is the requirements of colleges and departments *within* the universities—whose activities the universities affect not to notice. It is they that insist that no one can read history unless he has A Level French and Latin; or science unless three or four scientific A Levels. No wonder Russian makes little progress in the schools when the whole humanities teaching (for scientists as well as arts specialists) has to be geared to producing qualifications in French and Latin. No wonder the schools plead for minority time in the Sixth Form when departments press for more and more qualifications.

Then there is the maze of procedures and

exam curricula that admit boys to the Oxford and Cambridge colleges. It is false to represent the choice of candidates made by admissions tutors as corrupt; with few exceptions they are not searching for Blues or potential pious benefactors. Their choice reflects the national system of education and the advantage which public schoolboys obtain from smaller classes and better equipment. But the chaos of the system—the waste of time and energy in both Oxbridge and the schools, the disregard by the colleges of interests other than their own parochial determination to get the best entry, the refusal in most cases to hold one instead of two examinations—is fantastic. Academic freedom certainly consists in universities being free to admit this candidate and reject that. But it cannot be cited in defence of the present lack of system; and it would not be surprising if a socialist government decreed that each type of school, independent, direct grant and L.E.A. maintained, should be allotted a quota of places at each university allocated on the percentage of sixth formers studying in each type of school—much as the grammar schools would resent such a proposal.

IT HAS AGAIN for long been axiomatic that universities should be free to decide what they teach, how to teach it, and what research should flourish within their walls. But this axiom is no longer self-evidently true. A very high proportion of research in universities is financed from outside sources—those sources that Butterfield finds so sinister. In science the main agencies are the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Medical Research Council, and the Agricultural Research Council. The men who control these bodies are not ignorant civil servants or philistine industrialists. They are in fact for the most part brilliant and original university scientists, and many of the research units and projects that they have sponsored have turned out to have made the most exciting advances. The scientific councils, however, set up a tension within universities. They want to start new lines of research and expect after five years or so the universities to take them over. The universities, cramped for floor-space and crimped for money, cannot afford to take them over unless the U.G.C. gives them larger grants to do so: or rather they are unwilling to suppress departments or lines of research already long established in order to provide funds for the novelties.

The late Victorian axioms made no provision for such an operation as suppressing a department. They belonged to the age of Newtonian physics. Departments were regarded as solid and indestructible as atoms. To-day we know that scientific departments are highly fissile and the rate at which they break up into sub-departments each clamouring for men and equipment is a fact that dons have yet to learn how to live with. But if most of the cells of the organism multiply, some of them die—and there are only the most cumbersome and embarrassing arrangements for removing the corpses. University administrators make singularly bad undertakers. To suppress a department is the most difficult of all operations in the university.³ Which universities have studied methods of controlling the conception of scientific departments? Which plan to inter the moribund? What happens to-day is that the rejuvenating forces come too much from outside the university and are not built into its structure. But it will not do to argue that rejuvenation from outside is an evil.

THE SITUATION is quite otherwise in the humanities and social sciences. They have to rely for staff and funds on what the U.G.C. allocates their university. Directly after the war, the Clapham and Scarbrough Reports drew attention to the fact that the social sciences and Slavonic and Oriental studies were languishing for lack of funds. The U.G.C. accordingly gave grants to universities earmarked for these fields, but in accordance with the recommendations of the Reports leaving the universities to implement the policies. The universities—with some notable exceptions, *e.g.*, in London—responded as might have been expected. The well-established social sciences—economics or politics or economic history—got the lion's share; the struggling infants, such as sociology, were lucky if they got

skimmed milk. The entrenched linguists set up posts in Middle Persian and Mandarin Chinese; but the hope that some students might learn the living languages and cultures of Asia and Africa died—it died so desperately that ten years later the U.G.C. set up another Committee under Sir William Hayter to conduct a post-mortem and to perform a miracle of resurrection. Meanwhile the universities had let it be known that they disliked ear-marked grants as a form of concealed coercion—and such grants have never been heard of again.⁴

The U.G.C. lets it be known that it will be willing to provide funds for some new project, but it intimates that the university concerned must make the necessary financial and administrative adjustments to enable the new development to be carried forward in the years to come. Unless the new project is closely geared to some sectional interest or another it will never be born. Perhaps this picture is over-painted. It is true that universities which are expanding and are therefore being granted money to expand will have less difficulty in finding room for new subjects or research projects than those which are not. But the crunch always comes when a department has to choose between strengthening its established lines of teaching and research (which must be strengthened if it is to teach more students) and introducing a new subject; or when it weighs the need for more staff against better facilities, new equipment or more laboratory or secretarial assistants for the existing staff.

IT IS, OF COURSE, an axiom that a university is composed of these faculties and departments, most of which offer separate courses leading to an honours degree. Indeed, one of the most formidable axioms bequeathed by the late Victorian reformers was that such departmentalism guaranteed that universities would not become infected by vocational studies. Universities, it was argued, existed to train students in the discipline of a recognised branch of scholarship. A new branch was recognised only if its standards of scholarship could measure up to those of the old branches. In fact the axiom rested on a fallacy. The fallacy sprang from the failure to remember that every branch of learning at one time trained men in a general way for a vocation. In the 16th century, Latin and Greek were studied to re-discover the long lost (and therefore modern) knowledge concealed in the writings of the ancients. Theology, medicine, and law were all vocational yet at

³ It is genuinely difficult. Dons resemble civil servants in that they hold their posts to a retiring age; and the system of filling posts as they become vacant, particularly when those posts are attached to a teaching programme, tends to become automatic.

⁴ Professor Butterfield tells us that it gave him a "peculiar tingle" when he heard Mr. R. A. Butler in a speech gravely bidding the heads of the universities of many nations not to surrender the autonomy of universities; but he does not tell us whether he thinks that Butler betrayed this principle when he reinforced the study of criminology at Cambridge with a special grant of public money which resulted in this subject at last finding a place in the undergraduate curriculum.

the same time scholarly subjects. History and natural science, introduced in the 19th century, were both finally recognised as scholarly disciplines in their own right but the former was praised as an education for the statesmen of the future and the latter as a tool by which Nature could be mastered. There is no need for elaborate defences to be raised against vocational courses in universities. Give any subject to a don and you can guarantee that he will make it academic—in other words he will deduce the general principles that govern it, establish its methodology and literature, and sub-divide its subject-matter. The criteria by which Professor Butterfield favours the expulsion of chemical engineering on the grounds that it is a vocational subject yet applauds the retention of law which (as taught in England) is the most flagrantly vocational of all traditional subjects, remain mysterious.

AT FIRST SIGHT undergraduates to-day appear to be much more aware than their predecessors were that a degree is a vocational asset, but in pre-war days the link between preferment in a profession and the class obtained in a particular subject often existed. It existed for the prospective don or teacher. It existed for the priest or public servant. When the Trevelyan-Northcote report was at last implemented, and competitive examination governed entry to the foreign and civil service, the examination was not specially designed for public service. It was set on subjects which the applicants would have studied at the university, and the First in classics or in history was asked to repeat his performance in the civil service exam if he was to have a chance of gaining a place. This test of ability has now been accepted by business and industry who seem to be startled to find that proficiency in a specialist subject is not an infallible guide to financial and organising ability. There is no reason why it should be, still less why university courses should be designed to help business select its personnel. Nevertheless if there is practically no correspondence between the studies of undergraduates and the skills that they need later in life, the university is betraying, not defending, its role. The fact that Peter Marris deduces that the tension has become acute in students' minds between looking on their studies as a general education or scholarly discipline and looking at them as a preliminary to a career suggests that all is not well. There should be a tension, indeed there always has been; but the

discrepancy between the two goals should not gape as wide as it does.

FIFTY YEARS AGO the departmental honours course was still broad enough for the able student to relate what he learnt, often unconsciously, to the modes of discussion in the world at large. It is seldom so to-day. Not only learning but the techniques of establishing truth have become specialised. The most notorious effect of departmentalism is that it has pushed specialisation deep down into the schools. What this does to school education is well known; what is sometimes forgotten is what it does to university education. Many boys and girls are often studying at school what they find they have to study in the first years at the university. They already know about Dr. G. R. Elton's revolution in Tudor government or Professor H. R. Trevor-Roper's analysis of the 17th-century gentry. As a result the departments jack up the standards for entry even higher. Professor B. Thwaites at Southampton is campaigning against the attitude of mathematics faculties which, finding that clever undergraduates have already covered part of the curriculum at school, make their courses even more esoteric so that none but the highest of mathematicians can attempt them, and are then surprised that the schools cannot find mathematics teachers. Meanwhile the departments, always anxious to increase the number of their staff, insist that students must study every aspect of the subject. Every student of science must have done routine titration in the lab; his course is planned on the assumption that he will later research—though in fact only a fraction do so. Although biological subjects are becoming more and more susceptible to the techniques of physics and chemistry, how many undergraduates studying physics do biology, or biologists mathematics?

THE REMEDY FOR departmentalism is not to force every honours student to do a general degree. The worst syllabus is that which consists of snippets and outline courses and the student who is most lost is the one who does not know what subject he is really studying. Nor is it to abolish every departmental course in all universities, and to substitute general courses with vague emphasis on a major subject. Although some students coming from schools with a poor Sixth Form record or students of lower ability need more broadly based studies, and although even the best students could benefit if depart-

mental studies included papers set on allied disciplines, the departmental course should still retain its place in *some* universities and for some students. But we need variety in courses just as we need more variety than we have got in types of universities; and the departmental course at present tyrannises the Sixth Forms. The remedy for excessive specialisation lies in the hands of the universities. They have the power to alter and vary their entrance requirements. But this they cannot do unless they abandon another assumption implicit in the Victorian reforms. This is the assumption that as much knowledge as possible must be crammed into the undergraduate course and that postgraduate study is reserved specifically for the embryo don or the student from overseas seeking a professional qualification. The cure lies in expanding our graduate schools.

For it follows that the more you innovate, the more you try to introduce inter-disciplinary subjects, the more you are going to find excluded what should not have been excluded. If we are to lighten the load upon the undergraduate of sheer acquisition of knowledge and techniques, the better second-class men as well as the outstanding students must be allowed to stay on for further study. This means that we must extend the range of studies in graduate schools and the range of students according to their capacity. Some may work for the Ph.D. and attend seminars; but graduate work should also mean rounding off the undergraduate course and working for a one-year exam such as that excellent Oxford innovation the B.Phil.

The demand for university places is so desperate that all undergraduates cannot study for four years; but the more first degree students there are, the more varied the courses and types of first degree we establish, and the more post-graduate work will have to be extended. We are bound to move closer to an American pattern of higher education, and even if we need not imitate American undergraduate curricula or the long-drawn-out ritual of the Ph.D., we could study American graduate schools with profit. It is there that their students catch up with ours and work with an intensity that puts many of our Ph.D. students to shame. Unless graduate schools expand, our undergraduate courses can never improve.

IT IS THE POWER of departmentalism that the new universities are trying to break. The new universities excite much interest; but the

really interesting experiment that they are conducting is an experiment in university organisation—an experiment they believe to be crucial for both teaching and research. They are trying to break the hegemony of the independent departments—self-perpetuating, self-contained, erecting their own fortresses in the shape of tailor-made buildings—by integrating them in Schools of Study and indeed by trying to prohibit them from forming. But are there at the moment many signs that the established universities are preparing to cure the administrative malaises that excessive departmentalism creates? Are there even any signs that they are going to respond to the Royal Society's plea to departmentalise biology?

Anyone, however, who considers how the internal government of universities can be reformed to deal with these problems should begin from a premise put forward by Sir Eric Ashby. A university, Ashby argues, cannot be run as a business because decisions are not taken at the top and passed down to be implemented at the bottom. On the contrary: the decisions concerning education and research which really matter must be taken by those who themselves teach and research, and the bureaucracy at the top exists only to make the task of departments easier by reconciling conflicting interests. If any vice-chancellor told his colleagues how they were to conduct their research and teaching, they would be justified in having him certified. This is why there is at present discontent in the civic universities where non-professional staff have little or no representation on Senate. The constitution of these universities for the most part followed that which Manchester adopted in the first decade of this century at a time when the vast majority of the staff were professors; but despite the fact that the staffs have grown since then so that they now greatly out-number the professors they remain disinherited.

Nevertheless the professoriate still resists the movement to give the younger members of the staff a chance to take part in public discussion or a voice in decision-making. And that voice needs to be heard not on egalitarian grounds but because the best ideas in teaching and research so often come from the young.

OLIGARCHIC THOUGH IT may be, the structure of civic universities at any rate permits decisions to be taken—and taken quickly. The democracies of Oxford and Cambridge resemble the descriptions of the Polish Diet. The colleges are

independent of the university and independent of each other; and every decision of the central bodies of the university can be brought to a vote by the resident dons. The agonies of paralysis produced by this system have to be experienced to be believed, and only those who have suffered in trying to effect even minute changes can do justice to the description of a system which might have been planned to perpetuate a state of civil war in which no side can ever win. What is excellent is the number of dons who are consulted and enjoy their responsibility to criticise. What is bad is the inability, or the unwillingness, to take unpleasant decisions which are left to central committees with shifting membership.

In practice common sense prevents the cumbersome machine from grinding to a halt. But the pace is exceedingly slow. As at Cambridge an important piece of business will have to be sent to faculties or colleges for their comments—and as obtaining these comments may take at least a term—and as the central bodies do not meet in vacations—and as no controversial issue can be put to the university vote between the middle of May and the middle of October, one has to be pretty nippy at the beginning of an academic year in putting forward a proposal if a decision is to be taken before the year is out. If only to deal with building programmes, where hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money are being spent, some reform of internal administration is vital.

But it is vital for other reasons. At present Oxford and Cambridge embitter the civic universities and irritate Whitehall. They resist attempts to integrate them into a national system of higher education and are for ever pleading that their system of internal government depending on the votes of the dons and the fiat of independent colleges absolve them from the obligation to fit in with other universities. They argue that they cannot be expected to give consistent answers because they have no strong central direction. They are already envied for their beauty, their national and international prestige, their independent sources of finance, their powerful lobby and the magnetic attraction that they are able to exert upon staff and students. If they are not to bring down upon themselves the accumulating wrath of their colleagues they must overhaul their system of administration.

FINALLY, THERE IS the axiom that, whatever the

internal government of a university may be, it alone has the right to develop any branch of learning that it sees fit. But can this freedom continue to be interpreted as it has been in the past when the money for development is handed out by the U.G.C. which is adjudicating between hundreds of bids put forward by the departments of all universities? With seven new universities being founded and most civic universities expanding, with colleges of advanced technology, technical colleges, and teachers' training colleges all multiplying and expanding, there is not conceivably going to be enough money available to allow all universities to study all subjects effectively. Nor are there going to be enough men of distinction in every field to make such a dream come true.

Another axiom of the Victorian reforms is to-day looking less like an axiom—the Idea of a University as a place where all subjects and disciplines rub shoulders. The tyranny of the Idea is very real. We plan even our new universities broadly on the subject-pattern of the old. Yet there is no reason why a university has to offer all the traditional subjects—they don't in America nor do the *Grandes Ecoles* in France. And if it is true that every subject is becoming each decade more and more fissile as learning sets off the chain reaction of new kinds of knowledge, what alternative is there but to declare that at this particular university certain subjects will *not* be studied? If this is not done the universities will consist of numbers of small departments few of which will have the resources in men and money to conduct efficient research. Circumstances have in fact dictated that some subjects such as nuclear physics are zoned. But at present no one has the power to undertake a review of the curriculum of all universities to see whether in fact some subjects could be concentrated in two or three universities leaving others to a further two or three. The U.G.C. understandably still clings to its original brief that its duty is to disburse public funds for which the universities are free to bid. There is no superstructure to university administration any more than there is an infrastructure.

HOW FAR THE Robbins Committee will make recommendations on the administrative matters discussed above is doubtful. What is beyond doubt is that they will have to make recommendations about the superstructure of higher education of which the universities are only a part. The spectrum of higher studies

is wide. If we omit all the research units which work for the Ministry of Defence, there are the numerous out-stations of the Research Councils very few of whose scientists are engaged in teaching, and who ultimately through the Councils fall under the wing of the Lord President of the Council. There are the universities financed mainly through the U.G.C. by a Treasury grant but also dependent for research grants on the Research Councils and other outside bodies. Then there are the institutions of further education under the Minister of Education, the C.A.T.s, the Technical Colleges, and the Teachers' Training Colleges. The expansion of higher education must be so great, and the expenditure so vast, that some co-ordination and formal public control of funds is inevitable.

This is why the original proposal put forward by Professor Stephen Toulmin and others that these matters could be solved if only universities charged realistic fees seems to me to be unrealistic. The argument—if I follow it correctly—seems to be that the cost of a university at present met by a block grant from the U.G.C. could be met by raising fees (which on all sides are admitted to have no reasoned basis) to £1,200-£1,500 a year per student. The fees would be paid in effect by the State and Local Authorities. The universities would be free within these limits to organise such studies and research as they saw fit and a healthy degree of competition to produce attractive and challenging curricula would be introduced. At the same time the universities would be freed from control by bureaucrats who never can know what ventures in which university merit support. The proposal appears to ignore the fact that there already exists a peck-order in universities; that the flexibility which it seeks to introduce will be nullified by the administrative diseconomies referred to above; and that the universities, no more than hospitals or schools, can no longer be left in our mixed economy unaccountable financially to Parliament or to some government agency.

For once university education comes to be regarded not as a privilege for a small élite, but as *part* of a large-scale venture in higher education for 20 per cent of the adolescent population by the end of the century, a number of consequences follow. It used to be argued that the universities benefited by being outside the ministerial structure in that they escaped the Treasury chopper. Few dons who have seen their scale of stipends decline in the last decade

can to-day be so optimistic. Some of them now pin their hopes in the creation of a Ministry of High Studies—of Cabinet rank or in a Minister of Education, who would certainly be of Cabinet rank, with under him two Ministers of State (one for higher studies and one for schools). It may well be that the word, "Ministry," will be avoided as calculated to give offence; but some agency will surely be created under which the universities will fall. Whatever recommendation the Robbins Committee makes will be attacked. The Ministry of Education will not wish to surrender the teachers' training colleges that are geared to produce teachers for the schools, nor will they like to see their prize animals, such as the C.A.T.s, removed from their control. At the other end of the spectrum the Research Councils will pray to be kept out of a ministerial orbit and retain their independence under the Lord President on the grounds that if their grant gets merged in a block grant to higher education, research will be sacrificed time and again to the need for buildings and equipment for teaching. On the other hand the universities will look jealously at the out-stations of the Research Councils and see in them a potential supply of desperately needed scientific teachers; and they will argue with justice that these scientists could spare one or even two days to teach research students and undergraduates in term time without their research being impaired.

YET ALTHOUGH a ministerial superstructure may introduce priorities and co-ordination where none now exists, it can do little unless the internal administration of the universities themselves is changed. And it is difficult to see how such a change can come about without a revolution in the way that dons look at their job.

The amount of time that is spent in academic rituals is astonishing. They are the rituals connected with examining undergraduates or students for the Ph.D., M.A., diplomas, and certificates in advanced study; in admitting students; in faculty and college committees; in academic conferences; in discussing buildings, amenities, and sitting on dozens of other boards and sub-committees. There are sacrosanct concepts such as the academic year of three terms beginning and ending on holy dates; there are untouchable vigils and inviolable festivals. It is assumed that a new laboratory has to be planned in detail to fit the exact requirements of the present professor: even though all experience

shows that such a laboratory will be out-of-date in twenty-five years. Vast lecture halls rise as if the lecture must for ever be the basic method of instructions. Halls of residence are built to perpetuate a ritual of student existence that is no longer appropriate to undergraduates of today. Whether it is in bricks and mortar or in academic arrangements, we plan for eternity even though we ought by now to know that buildings with movable partitions and flexible arrangements that create a minimum of vested interests should be our transient goal.

Nothing could be more likely to do good than for each faculty or college to set up one more committee whose duty would be to free their colleagues from as much administrative work as possible so that they could devote themselves to research and teaching; and nothing is less likely to occur.

IT IS UNLIKELY TO OCCUR because Britain is sick of a governmental disease. Again and again observers at home and from other countries diagnose a failure of nerve in our political life. Our diplomacy is feeble; our financial policy is neither one thing nor another and negates our policy for industrial expansion; whether it is the problem of conurbation, town planning, roads and railways, the organisation of industry, the priorities in social welfare, the working of local government, or almost any branch of public activity, we seem to be unable to move fast enough to keep up with the rate at which the impersonal forces of history are changing.

We have perfected a system of government and the system is pressing us to death. That system is democracy through committee. It is superficial to talk of a lack of leadership or of the psychological barrier to accepting and operating in the post-war world. The engine turns over sweetly, the wheels revolve, but the vehicle fails to move: the committees are convened, they report back, the conveners object, the committees reconsider, the public is consulted, every view and every interest is weighed—and in the process the goals become dim—until as the years pass they change their shape so palpably that the committees have to begin their task anew.

In the universities this disease is exacerbated by a complication. We govern ourselves in our

spare time. The first duty of a don is to teach and research. The arguments nearest our heart are those which arise in research or in the curriculum. Most of us at some stage get sucked into administration and sit on committees for a few years, but we acquire the knack of swimming to the edge of the whirlpool and clambering on to dry shore to return to our true vocation. A few become committee men for good, but even they work at it half-time and continue at least to teach and examine. They have no time to examine major problems—they have to run hard to stand in the same place. Hardly anyone has begun to consider how considerably larger numbers of students are going to be taught by staffs little larger than the present size; and those who advocate expansion of higher education up to date have not made many practical suggestions.

I am not advocating that a horde of hard-headed and over-precise bureaucrats should be brought in to run the universities. But if the dons themselves are to continue to control their affairs a few of them must sacrifice their careers to analyse how the organism in which they live could be rejuvenated or how its ailments could be palliated.

IT HAS, OF COURSE, always been fashionable to diagnose the ailments as spiritual disorders. There is no end to books that proclaim a crisis in the universities which springs from lack of faith, or insufficient humanism, or the chasm which looms between two or more cultures. These are the terms in which a few wise men, and many charlatans, have accustomed us to discuss universities. And yet much as society always is in want of a great critic, to insist that the machinery of academic life needs refurbishing is not philistine. For the late Victorian axioms are cracking. It is as if a Lobachewsky or a Goedel were destroying the old foundations of geometry and arithmetic. It is not late Victorian axioms but late Victorian administrators that we need—men such as Morant or Simon who can convince the vested interests where their true interests lie and who will satisfy Dr. Arnold's criterion that "no one ought to meddle with the universities that does not know them well and love them well."

Two Poems

Sestina

You must never unlock the cedar closet ;
Nor open the white doors to the music room
To be stared at by the French windows and drained
Flabby by the sucking mouths of pastel plants
Unseasonably bred, denatured, deformed.
There in the corner crouches the piano

That vibrates pianissimo piano
And crescendoes con amore in the closet
Of your mind, there by the agons of time deformed
And dimmed, but resonating, leaving no room
For any theme but dread. Behind the white doors plants
Alone were smiled at, but with joyless pride that drained

Odour and pollen. That indifference drained
The marrow from the bones of the piano,
Gutted the child, but watered the tuneless plants.
Only camphored clothing hangs in the closet,
No souvenir, no clue to another room—
Clothes sealed in paper and tidily deformed.

Go away. Do you think you can be deformed
Only once in the same way, that once drained
You cannot be drier? Play the piano
Louder than the echoes of pain but the room
With the staring windows will again closet
You with the chords of terror and the deaf plants.

O multiply impotent is she who plants
Her target heel on thresholds so deformed
By strangled battles that the air is drained
Of sustenance as a sealed up closet,
Or, as the tense unplucked strings of a piano.
Step back. There is blood in the music room.

Totem's whistle skirled and dwindled in this room
Of slaughter. Rosily embalmed the corpse-plants
Frill the bald windows back of the piano.
The keyboard makes faces at the most deformed
Of all, at her who snail-wise wears her closet
On her back: the leech by which her veins are drained.

Drained child, child still, you are buried in this room,
Embalmed like the plants, hanging in the closet,
Muted in hate as the piano, and deformed.

Isabella Gardner