

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY, RECONSIDERED

IN its beginnings the thing we call a University ran ahead of its idea of itself. It grew, not unintelligently, but with little, if any, reflection on itself. Subsequently, and especially in the last hundred years, there has been much speculation about what a University should be; and there have been many experiments in erecting theory into fact. The palm for the best theory unquestionably goes to John Henry Newman, and so to the Catholics of England, whom he claimed, and is now allowed, to represent. No theory, anywhere, remains more remote from fact than this remains in England.

This may be blameworthy, but there is some excuse for it. The English are not idealists, their genius is practical. They do not proceed from ideas to action: they act first and think afterwards, with a tendency, stronger in each generation, to think that what they have done or left undone was rightly done or left undone because 'twas they themselves that did it or did it not. On this general ground, and on the ground of its particular application to education, especially University education, the claim of English Catholics to be truly English cannot be denied. In this characteristic the Irish amongst them are thoroughly anglicized. As a body Catholics in this country are not at all dissatisfied with what they have done or not done for themselves in education these last hundred years. Their dissatisfaction is almost wholly with what others have done or not done for them. Exceptions there are: mostly converts like Newman himself, and idealists like him. Like him they love the life of the mind, and follow it even to its own surrender in faith; and like him, until they are safely dead, they become generally suspect of not being quite English. All this, though irritating, is excusable in England. Even the Universal Church finds it, though vexatious, tolerable.

A deeper excuse than our complacency condones the present condition of Catholic University Education in England. It is the fact of the continuous survival in our midst of two of the original Universities of Christendom. Oxford and Cambridge came into existence without antecedent theoretical planning, and, except for one subversive radical reform which shifted their religious foundation from rock to sand, they have ever since continued their existence without much speculative wonder whither they were going until after the event. Until the religious change came, Catholics, backed by every

first title of law and right, and none gainsaying, considered themselves their only authors and owners. When the change came they fled, perforce; protesting their claim as never before, and meaning to come back to renewed possession and authority. But the position of an actual possessor improves with time, which gives birth and growing strength to prescriptive rights. Religious tests kept Catholics out of their patrimony, including the Universities. When at last the tests began to be gradually relaxed, hereditary Catholics had all but forgotten that their old Universities still existed. Education for them had become a matter of preserving the supernatural essentials of their faith, not of developing it to its maximum of natural culture. For the Universities it was rapidly becoming a matter of making natural culture independent of religion, and even an antidote to it and substitute for it.

After the Oxford Movement, favoured by the gradual relaxation of religious tests, some individual Catholics, most of them sons of converts, began to steal back to the old Universities. Their yearning to be there, and the yearning of their fathers to have them there, differed in at least one important respect from the yearning to be back there that tore the hearts of the last generation of Catholic dons, Allen, Bristow, Campion, Martin, Worthington and the rest when they became fugitives and exiles in Rheims, Douai and Rome. These last had no desire to return to their old Universities unless, or until, the old Faith was restored to its old primacy there. Their times being what they were, they could have no hope, or even thought, of returning as Catholics tolerated by Universities persisting in the new religion and heading towards irreligion. But it was precisely to Universities rejoicing in the full religious fruits of the Reformation that the nineteenth century converts desired to go back. They wanted the culture of Oxford and Cambridge exactly as it was in their day, excepting only its official religion and unofficial irreligion. Some of them even hoped to convert the one and stem the other. None of them feared to lose his own faith in the hostile environment. They rather expected the hostility to strengthen their faith, and their faith to dissipate the hostility. In this hope they had the support of many good arguments. They were fresh and enthusiastic in their Catholic faith, and had won their way to it by fighting for it against odds. They had first-hand knowledge of the culture of Oxford and Cambridge, if not actually by having been undergraduates or graduates themselves, at any rate—and this gave them a better insight—by the effects of that culture in their own cultured families and homes, and in the cultured society in which they were at home. They believed, and had ample Catholic doc-

trinal authority to confirm their belief, that faith and culture mutually lead each to the other. Historically some of them argued that the original inspiration still lay latent in the culture of the old Universities; therefore Catholics entering into it would revive its dormant Catholic principles, and so save the culture itself from otherwise inevitable decay. They could even cite some historical Catholic precedent for what they desired; for instance, Cardinal Philip Howard, when a boy, was with his two brothers, future Dukes of Norfolk, entered a fellow commoner of St. John's College, Cambridge.

But such a case was an exception in the general tradition of hereditary Catholics. They followed Allen and his contemporaries in their refusal to think of a return to the Universities as long as these persisted in their apostasy. As the hope of their repentance and conversion was longer and longer deferred, English Catholics came to ignore them; and after Emancipation they showed no more interest in the possibility of their being soon received back to Oxford and Cambridge than they later showed in restoring the Hierarchy to Canterbury and York and the other ancient Catholic Sees. They had no sympathy with the hankerings of the nineteenth century converts. In this they had Rome with them, and much more fervently than Rome, Cardinal Manning and the 'ultramontane' wing of the recent converts. These successfully invoked against any Catholics who should attempt to go to Oxford or Cambridge the decrees of Pius IX. against 'mixed education.'

Then came the idea of creating an entirely new and entirely Catholic University out of nothing; not indeed in England itself, but on the nearest English-speaking shore oversea. Newman—consciously, the least tempted of all the converts to return to Oxford, unconsciously and in spite of himself the most anguished with the temptation—was called upon by the Hierarchy to play the part of creator. He elaborated his well-nigh perfect *Idea of a University*, and did his mighty best to turn it into fact in Dublin. But the very *Idea* was too English for the Irish, and—being an idea—too un-English for the English. It remained, and still remains, an idea.

Had it succeeded in fact, Catholics sending their sons to Oxford or Cambridge to-day would stand at the same low level of public esteem as do those Catholics who still persist in sending their sons to Eton or Winchester. Its failure caused the desire for a return to the the Universities, whose irreligious tendency had strengthened, not only to revive, but to spread. Newman was again called upon to lead and guide; this time by the laity, and towards, not away from, 'mixed education.' He responded nervously but more eagerly than he knew until he found himself outmanoeuvred at home by the 'ultra-

montanes.' No Catholic might go to Oxford or Cambridge without a special dispensation. A dispensation for Newman was refused before he applied for one, and while it seemed to him that the ecclesiastical authorities were asking him to go.

The result was an educational deadlock for Catholics, imposed on themselves by themselves. Emancipated, and reinforced by a flood of highly educated converts, they were no better off educationally than their forefathers had been in penal days. The Educational Laws of 1870 obliged them to provide schools and teachers for their poor children up to the age of thirteen. This, by a heroic effort, and working together as one body with one heart and one mind, they did and continued to do for over thirty gruelling years. But the motive of the effort was not love of natural human culture as such; it was anxious zeal for the conservation and propagation of supernatural faith. The effort was noble rather than successful. If all the living descendants of the children who passed through Catholic elementary schools in those thirty years were themselves Catholics to-day, the Catholic population of England would now be some nine or ten millions; actually it is less than three millions, and in quality thin at the edges. There were two main reasons for the disappointing result. First, the religious education of most children ended too early; secondly, even that little religious education lacked the reinforcement of the beginning of natural culture which children must have, if in later life they are to master the world they live in and not be enslaved by it.

Secondary education made these defects good in part, but only for a narrow section of the Catholic community. It was undertaken not by the community as a body, but by volunteers, the religious orders principally. And even this higher schooling ended too soon and was culturally defective. It led to no higher culture, and aimed at none. The teachers themselves had none. The keystone of all education, the University, was winning.

The need of it might have been foreseen theoretically; and most easily by an application of Newman's Idea to the whole of education and to the whole of Catholic life. But facts rather than speculations revealed it, and pressed it urgently on the Catholic conscience. The need was supplied not ideally, by another attempt to create a Catholic University; but practically, by the removal of the ban on 'mixed education' as far as Universities were concerned.

That is where we stand to-day. As far as we can make them so, and for as long as we can keep them so, our schools, elementary and secondary, are purely Catholic. But our University education, and so the *teaching* in our schools and the highest culture of our

laity, is mixed. What we are getting out of our education in Universities, far more irreligious than those our forefathers refused to go to, must therefore in fact be either dominating or frustrating, not only all our Catholic education, but all our Catholic home life and all our Catholic professional life. Frustration is obviously to be avoided at all costs: domination is better. But it can clearly be only the domination of irreligion unless we are dominating the irreligious Universities in which we mix.

Can we do this? And if so, how? These are the very questions to which Newman gave us the well-nigh perfect answer nearly a century ago. They are now such urgent questions that his Idea of a University needs to be urgently reconsidered by everybody responsible for Catholic education at any of its levels. The two points he urged most upon the consideration of those who were then calling for a purely Catholic University are the two points especially to be reconsidered by us who have to deal with mixed Universities.

First, those Catholics who go to Universities, whether to learn or to teach, must before all else possess, or be taught to possess, their religion as an exact science and a full culture. This consideration principally concerns the clergy. Properly reconsidered it will be found to mean that all Catholic education is necessarily unsound from top to bottom unless the clergy possess, and can impart, the faith as theology not less, but more, perfect scientifically than any other science in the University; and as a form of life yielding nothing to any other art or culture. It further means that every lay Catholic in a University, student or professor, must make it his first care to have his religion thus taught to him.

Secondly, all subjects learned or taught, whether by Catholics or others, must be informed by sound philosophy and controlled by sound logic. This consideration concerns everybody, laity as well as clergy, non-Catholics as well as Catholics. But it lays a special obligation on Catholics. In our fallen nature, philosophy is perfected only by fighting, and logic is the actual fighting. Every relation in a University is a relation, often alternating momentarily, between teacher and taught. There is no strict equality between any two on any point at any given moment. In all our converse with one another we are all teaching one another or learning from one another in an ever-changing see-saw. In any passage between the two, no pupil can learn intelligently, and no master can teach intelligently, unless the deeps of each mind exactly answer the deeps of the other; and the deeps of man's mind and his philosophy are one and the same thing. There can be only one philosophy in a University or in a universe; else all is chaos and misunderstanding—

the state in which we are suffering so unnaturally to-day. In a University where religion is mixed the primary human duty—a duty to religion most of all—is to fight down mental chaos; temporary student fighting temporary master, and vice-versa.

The special responsibility that lies on Catholics in this rough and tumble should be clear to all who know the Latin word for learning. There can be no discipline where there is no rod—or rood. Without the discipline of the Cross philosophy, though it may touch great heights and depths occasionally, can never lead men to a better conclusion than it led the Greeks in the end. Even we who acknowledge Aristotle as one of our masters agree a better philosophy and a better master than the Greeks ever had. Catholics profess to know who that Master is and to love his discipline. In a University it is more than elsewhere important that professors should live up to what they profess.

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