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Dear Mr. Vander Hill:

This letter is to certify my approval and acceptance of the Honors Thesis entitled "British Universities in the Eighteenth Century - An Investigation of the Problems Which They Encountered" written by Barbara Joan Ressler.

Sincerely,

Richard Wires  
Professor of History

RW:pt
BRITISH UNIVERSITIES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY -
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH THEY ENCOUNTERED

By
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Advisor—Dr. Richard Wires

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Introduction

In today's world the university is often regarded as an essential component of society. The universities are accepting an increasing number of aspirants and attempting to equip these students with a background to deal successfully with life. Often this function is interpreted to mean a secure start on the road to material success. At the same time, the universities have assumed an intensified responsibility to produce the leaders, the intellectual elite, in many parts of the world.

The efforts to accomplish such aspirations have gone through several stages of transformation since the inception of the university system with the founding of the University of Bologna in the late eleventh century. Even the aims of the university have changed from time to time. From the following passage it is readily discernible that a wide chasm of development and philosophy separates the concept of the medieval university from that of its modern counterpart. "Ecclesiastical philosophy, canon law, together with a desultory inheritance of antiquity in the schemes of the septem artes liberales—all this, bound together with monastic forms in a community of work and social intercourse, makes up the medieval university."¹

In writing this paper I have attempted to present an overall view of the English universities of the eighteenth century (Cam-

bridge and Oxford), giving an indication of where they might stand in the total spectrum of change from medieval to modern times. Many historians and men of that century as well have indicated their low opinion of the eighteenth-century universities, even to the point of implying that this was a period of regression for the university system. There are a great many manifestations of deficient practices and personnel at the universities to uphold these arguments. But perhaps this situation, while not condoned, can at least be understood when one perceives the source for the ascent of a majority of the troubles which plagued the universities for the entire century.

The development of the eighteenth century which might well be considered the prime instigator of the degradation of the universities would be the move from royal and religious patronage of the universities to regional and even national support. It was at this point that the universities seem to have lost their positions as centers of high academic endeavor and become predominantly arenas for political maneuvering by the small and the great. The universities were constantly being harassed by political disputes and their normal procedures distorted due to outside interference by the powerful. One such instance was a royal decree in 1702 which required an oath of allegiance from all teachers. Many of the best professors felt themselves unable to comply with its terms and this began an exodus which resulted in few really exceptional instructors remaining in the universities. In fact, even the graduate student produced by the universities was of a rather low caliber in the majority of cases. Can this low level of academic achieve-
ment in both teacher and student be solely explained by political meddling? I think not entirely—some of the explanation must come from the effect of the Enlightenment philosophy on many men of the eighteenth century. The structure of the university had become so restrictive that to those affected by this Enlightenment belief in the strength of the individual the university system had become unbearable. Escape seemed to be the most common remedy which resulted in the founding of several "dissenting academies." Perhaps in a time other than the Age of Reason—when man had not begun to value his powers of reason above all else—the oppressive atmosphere of the universities could have been borne, but not during the eighteenth century.

Not only did the political and philosophical mood of the times pervade the universities, but the events of the preceding century had a very strong affect on the academic inclinations of the men of the eighteenth-century universities. The civil conflicts of the seventeenth century had gravely disrupted the habit of the quiet pursuit of knowledge. With the selfish aims of the Age of the Cavalier and the even more selfish aspirations of the Age of the Puritan, the academic life with its search for truth had become considerably relaxed. When the gloom of the Puritan Age was finally lifted due to the Restoration, the people over all of England found great and extended cause for celebration. As the period progressed it began to seem as though the quiet pleasures of academic life had been thoroughly forgotten. In essence the early part of the eighteenth century was viewed as one of widespread moral laxity, a situation which permeated all areas of English life, including the
This learned torpor into which the eighteenth-century universities had allowed themselves to descend was easily discernible in most phases of their scholastic life. One of the most blatant indicators of this condition was to be found in the examination system. Superficially the university's method of evaluation seemed adequate, but it had degenerated into exercises which were a meaningless formality. The whole system had become a farce and, to make matters worse, everyone in the university community was well aware that it was so. Another serious indicator of the plight of the universities was the poor caliber of the professors and instructors who supposedly held their positions as guides for the students on the path to higher education. After the Oath of Allegiance had removed the finest professors, the political arena took its toll through the practice of nepotism and favored candidates. Often candidates were appointed to teach subjects with which they were not in the least familiar. All of these factors combined with a secure tenure position to entrench professors of a rather low caliber in the universities. Since the professors were providing slight example for those students truly interested in an academic life, a system of private tutoring was established which was designed to offset the deficiencies of the professors. Unfortunately much the same situation arose with the tutors in that they, too, proved somewhat indolent in fulfilling their responsibilities. Even with such disadvantages the eighteenth-century universities could still have produced superior students if the raw material had been present initially. During this century, however, the students were generally
appraised as being much more interested in their social than in their scholastic life. In fact, a university education was often considered as an integral part of the social preparation of a well-bred gentleman before making his entrance into the real world. The quality of this social preparation might well be questioned when one considers that the three main obsessions of university students were thought to be drinking, wenching, and disloyalty.

Obviously in considering these conditions prevalent in the eighteenth-century universities, one could easily find a great deal for which the universities should be held accountable. Yet as evidence is presented through which a reasonably accurate evaluation might be made, it is essential to keep in mind the difference between the value-system and expectations of today and those of a period removed from us by two hundred years. There is a vital question to be asked: "Did the universities fulfill their purpose for existence in the eyes of eighteenth-century men?" In many cases the answer would be largely negative, but there was some redeeming value seen by even the most critical of observers. Perhaps it is really not our place to condemn, but to attempt to understand the cause-and-effect relationship of their problems. As a result we may be able to view some of our own twentieth-century university problems in a more objective light.
British Universities in the Eighteenth Century

The patrons of higher education in early centuries were religious bodies, kings, queens, and rich merchants. The eighteenth century saw the beginning of a movement away from private patronage towards corporate patronage. With the help of civic funds came naturally the involvement of city or regional or provincial, or even occasionally national, interests in university affairs. The government of universities ceased to be solely a matter for close corporations of scholars and began to be the shared preoccupation of scholars and distinguished laymen drawn from regional life. As a consequence of the growth of this interaction, the universities began to develop a sense of service to their region. It is this regional element in the life of an institution of higher education that forms another distinctive part of the historical pattern. The resounding triumph of corporate rights and vested interests over the attempted interference of James II, considered necessary to preserve English liberties in 1688, had for a long time afterwards the bad effect of freeing all privileged persons from any dread of inquiry or interference. This was as true for Parliament and the Church as it was for the Universities. Edward Gibbon deplored the monopoly enjoyed by Oxford and Cambridge of all the University privileges in England, because "the spirit of monopolists is narrow, lazy, and oppressive."

Since outside interests had come to play such a prominent role in university affairs, it is important to realize their condition at the time of the eighteenth century. Politically, both the Jacobite and Whig factions still had enough of a following to retain hopes for the future; the prestige and power of the national army and navy were still very much on the rise; the Church had been greatly revitalized in temporal matters by Queen Anne, especially in regard to her poverty-stricken clergy; and the Lower House of Convocation was making an extensive effort to revive ecclesiastical discipline and to suppress immorality.\(^1\)

Regardless of the positive aspects of university development, many have perceived this period as one of intellectual decline. Some very definite indications of this were the occurrences of professors being appointed to teach subjects of which they were largely ignorant, the indolence of many college tutors, and the disturbing number of students who spent the major portion of their college years in idleness and sometimes in dissolute living. There are some who view this situation as arising from the fact that Oxford and Cambridge were hindered in much of their development by those who sought to control them. These institutions were often harried and torn by political disputes. So perhaps the low level of thought and life, seemingly characteristic of both universities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is therefore largely due to this control and outside interference exercised by the King and Parlia-

But the causes behind the existing condition do not excuse that state of affairs and many have found much cause for condemnation of Oxford and Cambridge in the eighteenth century. Lord Malmesbury, who spent two years at Merton, indicates the severity of the young nobleman's life while at college: "A gentleman commoner was under no restraint and never called upon to attend either lectures, chapel, or hall. My tutor, an excellent and worthy man, gave himself no concern about his pupils." Nicholas Amhurst of Oxford was much more critical in his observations upon the qualifications of the faculty:

I have known a profligate debauchee chosen professor of moral philosophy; and a fellow, who never looked upon the stars soberly in his life, professor of astronomy; we have had history professors who have never read anything to qualify them for it, but Tom Thumb, Jack the Giant-Killer, and such-like valuable records.

Amhurst and many others seem to agree that the three obsessions of Oxford men were drinking, wenching, and disloyalty. Thus one can easily see by this small sample of contemporary opinion that at least a portion of eighteenth-century men held their institutions of higher learning to be of little intellectual value.

Mediocrities play their part in building up the whole; and it may at least be said of Cambridge during the middle years of the eighteenth century that, though not prolific of great scholars, it

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was particularly rich in university politicians. But this period of
university history does not present an unrelieved picture of sordid
struggles for the satisfaction of small, petty ambitions. The lamp
of learning was not burning with startling brightness but it was
still burning; jobbery was rampant but honest merit came sometimes
into its own; scandals were unpleasantly frequent but probably not
as frequent as is often assumed. For instance, there is a positive
side to be attributed to the university professor who so often bears
the brunt of criticism against the eighteenth-century university
system. Generally in religious orders and often of comparatively
lowly origin, he was a stranger to the exclusive social world of
his time. A professor commonly had no higher ambition than to be-
come a tutor to the son of an influential nobleman through whose
assistance he might secure advancement in the church. The average
university "don" only saw the polite world from the point of view
of the humble dependent.¹ Servile towards his superiors and over-
bearing towards those he considered beneath him, he was frequently
boorish with his friends and equals; but it must, in fairness, be
remembered that the seclusion which kept him a boor was productive
of certain virtues. It is likely that he had a far deeper and more
enduring love of his college and university than is at all common
at the present day. To his education he was mainly indebted for
whatever success he had achieved in life, and his college, if not
his first, was at least his greatest patron. It was, moreover, his
home in a way which it has nowadays ceased to be except for the few,

¹Denys A. Winstanley, The University of Cambridge in the Eight-
and he therefore gave it the affection which men reserve for their homes. He may often have quarrelled with his colleagues and neglected his pupils; but he was seldom found wanting in loyalty to the society to which he belonged.¹

One aspect of the university experience which often is taken as an indication of its quality, but can be misconstrued to show an inadequacy which does not really give an accurate picture of the value of the university, is the examination system. Before inspecting more specifically the eighteenth-century university’s method, we ought to try to divest ourselves of a modern opinion, that study exists for examinations rather than examinations for study. The eighteenth-century university student was often more encouraged and inspired in his scholastic endeavors by tutors and friends than by the examinations held by the university.² As books became cheaper, the quicker and more diligent students discovered that they could acquire knowledge for themselves where previous generations had been dependent on the oral teaching. Then arose the necessity of examination, and as this has come to be more scientifically conducted, and its results to be more public, and at last in a sense marketable, there has been a fresh demand for oral instruction. But the objective observer must investigate the two-fold implications of their oftentimes deficient examinations:

1. Did this method encourage the ascendancy of a situation


wherein those gentlemen who had little interest in studies became devoted to a life mainly consisting of drinking and whoring? Or

2. Did this system allow the learning and research of the more diligent students to explore more easily new, untried terrain?

The proposition of the establishment of a system where each person is allowed to follow his natural inclinations is foreign to much of today's educational philosophy. Is it really serving the best interests of everyone to compel each person to reach certain arbitrary standards in very structured areas—thereby risking the suppression of any creativity? All of this is usually defended by the certainty that those who are not interested in certain academic areas nevertheless must be made to study them. At any rate these are some considerations which should be kept in mind if one is to catch a glimpse of the eighteenth-century man's understanding of his educational system and if one is to discern the positive aspects of his examination system.

Yearly college examinations were the exception and throughout the century candidates for degrees were examined sometimes nominally, sometimes thoroughly, by the fellows of their own colleges before they were allowed to pass to the public examination of the schools or Senate-house. Oxford had a system which was actually called Wall-lectures and was required as a qualification for the degree of Master of Arts. These were supposed to be the delivery of three original dissertations in natural philosophy and three in moral philosophy. Their original purpose was to stimulate original
invention and research, but they had so degenerated that they were held *pro forma* in an empty school.¹

During the eighteenth century these exercises were required at Cambridge from Senior Sophs and Questionists in the last year of qualification for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. The first and very important ordeal through which all candidates had to pass was the *Acts and Opponencies*, or public exercises of the Schools, conducted in Latin under the superintendence of two Moderators. The "Respondent" or "Act," as he could then call himself, submitted three subjects on which he proposed to argue. The Moderator generally accepted the theses brought to him, and selected three other students whom, from inquiry of their tutors, he thought suitable to oppose the Respondent's arguments. In the course of the fortnight, in which the Respondent had to prepare himself, he asked the three opponents to take wine with him, partly to secure personal goodwill, but also to arrange the sham-fight beforehand.² G. V. Cox explained that

The examination for the B.A. degree under the old system had dwindled into a formal repetition of threadbare 'Questions and Answers' (in Divinity, Logic, Grammar), which had been transmitted in manuscript from man to man, and were unblushingly admitted, if not adopted, even by the 'Masters of the Schools'.³

In fact it was regarded as something exceptional when a student did arrange his own arguments.

²Ibid., p. 36.
When the fateful day arrived, the Respondent read a Latin thesis on whichever of his three subjects he preferred. Then each of the Opponents countered with various arguments of syllogistical form the Respondent attempting to reply to each in turn. John Jebb, who was a Moderator and was considered a radical reformer for the times, gave his opinion on the worth of these acts in 1772:

These exercises are improving; are generally well attended; and consequently are often performed with great spirit. But many persons of good judgment, observing with pain, the unclassical Latin, generally uttered by the student upon these occasions, have maintained that the knowledge of that language is not promoted by the present method of disputation; and have delivered it as their opinion, that these exercises should be held in English in order to their absolute perfection.¹

So obviously all was not completely dismal for the outlook of the examination system at Cambridge. There were a few, at least, who considered there to be some hope for the development of the examination system. But the deficiencies were still great—for example, two books of Euclid's Geometry, simple and quadratic equations, and the early parts of Paley's Moral Philosophy were deemed by most students amply sufficient in order to pass the examination.² The crux of the matter lies in the fact that while it may not have required a great deal of effort merely to pass the examinations, it did necessitate a considerable amount of proficiency in order to achieve the status of being placed on the Honors List. Here we encounter the situation which has greatly added to the disrepute of the eighteenth-century universities, but was considered to be equitable at


²Ibid., p. 56.
the time. This type of examination allowed even the most indolent student to pass with a minimum of effort—thus causing no embarrassment to the young noblemen who comprised the major portion of the university. But still there were provisions made to reward those who had a genuine desire to attain intellectual accomplishments.

In consideration of the unexacting manner of the examinations, it was regarded as a great reproach to the College to send any men without proper qualifications to such an examination. All Colleges, at some time before the final Senate-house examinations, would investigate the merits of their own men before they would permit them to undergo the examinations.\(^1\) Vicesimus Knox, who took his M.A. in 1753, had these comments on the examination system:

The examination . . ., though represented as very formidable, is such a one as a boy from a good school just entered might go through as well as after a seven years' residence. Few however reside; for the majority are called term-trotters, that is, persons who only keep the terms for form sake, or spend six or eight weeks in a year in the university to qualify them for degrees according to the letter of the statutes.\(^2\)

The two-fold implications of the examination system which were previously investigated may be used once again to advantage. Similar implications may also arise from a study of the detrimental effect which professors are reputed to have had on the eighteenth-century university. There is a great deal of truth in the traditional belief that the instruction given in the university was very far from satisfactory. It was by no means unknown for a newly ap-


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 233.
pointed professor to be unacquainted with the very rudiments of the subject he was supposed to teach. Undoubtedly, the eighteenth-century dons often set a bad example for scholastic endeavor. Their tenure was secure, sometimes irremovable. The extraction of an oath of allegiance which few honest churchmen could take meant that the plums of office went to the easy-going time-servers. Nepotism was common and celibacy was imposed upon the fellows. Many of them preferred to establish an illicit liaison rather than lose a comfortable sinecure.

Since the preceding century there had been a great falling off from the search for truth in the Science of Religion. The great civil conflict had unsettled the habit of quiet search, of sober life, and of the discovery of pleasure in intellectual pursuits. And when the struggle was over for awhile, the selfish worship of the puritan, and more selfish ungodliness of the cavalier, conspired towards the debasement of scholasticism. Although there was no wanting men of learning, the few great scholars of the eighteenth century did not communicate their knowledge and enthusiasm to the younger men. For a professor at a university to lecture was almost the exception. There were a large number of professors at each University who did not even pretend to lecture. Oftentimes they expected their wisdom to be conveyed in the disputes of the schools, by the publication of their writings, and by private instructions.


The Universities were by no means altogether dens of idleness; there was then a great part of the instruction of younger men which was not covered by the efforts of the professors. This deficiency was supplied in part by the work of college tutors. Although some tutors did neglect the instruction of their pupils, there was always a supply of tutors who fulfilled their duty scrupulously. Consequently these men caused their colleges to be popular with prudent parents and aspiring students. Students often relied upon their college tutors for initiation in each subject which they took up. But whether they did their work conscientiously or not, there was not that comradeship and intercourse between the senior and junior members of the university that there once had been.

It would seem that students were admitted, on the whole, at a later age than they had been in earlier time. This might well have been one of the causes which led to the discontinuance of the intimacy which had existed between tutor and pupil. Be that as it may, there can be little doubt but that the violence and suspicion which prevailed, the offspring of those party struggles which were so very prevalent in the early part of the eighteenth century, together with the spirit of self-indulgence which dominated the period following the Restoration, were thoroughly successful in bringing about an estrangement between the older and younger men. The result was that dons did not care for the society of undergraduates and undergraduates avoided dons.

The duty of the college tutors in the preceding century had been primarily to superintend the moral and religious discipline of their pupils, rather than to instruct in their studies. But
when stricter attention was paid to the performances of Exercises for Degrees, and above all when the Examinations were enforced, there grew up a class of private tutors. Their use had a tendency to become abused when the same persons could exchange the office of private tutor for that of examiner, within a very brief period. As early as 1759 the employment of private tutors, as examiners, was found to be a cause of unfairness. As to the effect upon young tutors themselves, William Wordsworth wrote to a young graduate of Cambridge:

I have only one observation to make, to which I should attach importance, if I thought it called for in your case, which I do not, I mean the moral duty of avoiding to encumber yourself with private pupils in any number. You are at an age when the blossoms of the mind are setting to make fruit; and the practice of pupil mongering is an absolute blight for this process.¹

Thus far in this investigation it has become apparent that in many cases the student was largely on his own if he wished to achieve a high degree of academic accomplishment. His tutor might encourage his endeavors and guide his reading, his professors might add some quantity of information through their lectures, but in the final analysis he depended to a great degree on his own desire and diligence to gain scholastically from his college experience. However, there was one very vital facility necessary to independent research which was lacking, either in quantity or availability, in the eighteenth-century university—the library. One of the things which would impress a visitor most during this period would be the wretch—

ed state in which most of the college libraries were kept. The great exception was the library of Trinity College, but even here the librarian knew little of his charge. At the smaller colleges the condition of things was most deplorable. Many librarians employed their time in noisily disturbing the readers or in making a profit from the sale of duplicates. To aggravate this problem the under-librarians were paid too little and worked too much.\footnote{Christopher Wordsworth, \textit{Scholae Academicae} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 3.\addfootnote{Ibid., p. 5.}} An instructive example of the typical state of affairs on the Oxford campus would be the Bodleian Library. Characteristic of the libraries of the period, its arrangement of books seemed deliberately constructed to make them as inaccessible as possible, the book indexes gave little assistance in the art of locating a book, and the librarians gave even less assistance. It becomes easier then to understand the reasons why many days passed without there being a single reader in Bodley, and rarely above two books were consulted in a day. The situation really becomes inexcusable when one discovers that the average between 1648 and 1650 was above a dozen. In 1787 complaints were formally lodged against the librarian for neglect and incivility; new rules were set up and conditions began to improve about 1789.\footnote{Ibid., p. 5.}

But Cambridge was in an even more miserable plight as regards its library. The entire collection was so small that it was accommodated in two rooms of moderate size. While Oxford's collections were greatly enriched by donors, Cambridge came off very poorly,
whether because it did not make more of an attempt to attract benefactors, or because the inexorable care with which Bodley kept the books within its walls pleased book-collectors better than the excessively accommodating openhandedness with which Cambridge lent and practically gave away its treasures. From the nature of the terms of admission into the Cambridge library, it is impossible to measure the use made of it at any period, as was done in the case of the Bodleian, but one of the causes which probably deterred some from frequenting that building in the more studious months was not wanting here. The severity of the cold in winter had the power to dishearten even the most enthusiastic student. It was not until 1790 and 1795 that fire-places were finally installed in the library.¹

Anthony a Wood had also suggested another contributing factor which added to the deficient state of the intellectual climate at the universities:

Why doth solid and serious learning decline, and few or none follow it now in the University? Answer, because of coffee-houses, where they spend all their time; and in entertainments at their chambers, where their studies and coffee-houses are become places for victuallers; also great drinking at taverns and ale-houses, spending their time in common chambers whole afternoon, and thence to the coffee-house.²

Thus far much has been presented displaying the grave deficiencies which plagued the eighteenth-century university—professors who did not lecture, indolent tutors, examinations performed merely as a formality, inadequate library facilities, and even the distrac-


tions offered by the coffee-houses. What caused these conditions—what factors contributed to the inception or growth of such conditions? The most blatant and perhaps most destructive force unleashed upon the universities during this period was political interference. This seems to have been a prime component in the system which came to acquire the ignominious reputation which the eighteenth-century university has been compelled to bear.

It might at first sight appear that politics could, or at least should, have little to do with the life and studies of a university. But this is far from being the real state of the case. After three such revolutions as England had experienced within half a century, it was impossible that the interest of the country should not be fixed upon public affairs. With this concern over national policies arose a greatly increased taste for pamphlets. This ephemeral literature supplied the place which newspapers and magazines occupy in our time, as well as in some measure the need for books. Pamphlets were also one of the important commodities with which the master of the coffee-house supplied his guests. During the eighteenth century these establishments were the stronghold of politicians—even as early as the time of Charles II, who had thought of terminating their operations within twenty years of the opening of the first one. In perusing the eighteenth-century tracts relating to both of the Universities, very few can be found which are totally unconnected with party dissensions.¹

It has all too often been conveniently generalized that during

this period Cambridge was Whig and Oxford Tory. This, like most brief classifying formulas, requires explanation, and, it may be, correction. Oxford had declared for William; and it is certain that the compulsory measures of the government had produced at least a seeming loyalty to the new king among its governing body. But it was during the reign of Charles and James II that the seeds of idleness and licentiousness were sown, products of which were later to affect William's reign. The severity of Puritanism was still fresh enough in the minds of Englishmen to tempt them to protract the rejoicing at the Restoration. It was not until personal holiness was all but extinct, and public religion was almost forgotten, that the death of Charles II brought his less genial brother to the throne. The house of Stuart was still popular at Oxford, and even the wrongs done them by James II could not efface from their hearts the loyal feeling impressed there by the other wrongs voluntarily suffered for his father. This deeply set loyalty was something which William could not inherit—thus the people were in no way blinded to or more forgiving of his faults as was the case with Charles and James II.

For who had not forgotten their reverence for God's worship, what sympathy could be felt for a king who wore his hat in church? King James at least did not err upon that matter. Where again was William's learning? What encouragement did he give to literature? Above all, what right did he have to rule over Englishmen? Such perhaps were the arguments of those who became known as the high-church party (Hickesites), some of whom suffered as non-jurors. This situation of suffering penalties as a non-juror came about as a result of an Act which received the royal assent on March 2, 1702.
It required that "all members of the foundations of any College or Hall in the Universities being of the age of eighteen years, and all persons teaching pupils, are obliged to take and subscribe the oath of abjuration in the court at Westminster." Nevertheless these Hickesites stood up boldly in the lower house of the Southern Convocation against the new low-church bishops, Hoadleians, to be silenced only by the unconstitutional measure of suppressing the Convocation.

In spite of the significant diminution of the Crown's powers wrought by the Revolution, William III in 1689 still retained considerable royal discretion, and John Locke, perhaps not without bitter memories of his expulsion, urged upon the King the following advice: "Sire, you have made a most glorious and happy Revolution; but the good effects of it will soon be lost, if no care is taken to regulate the universities." William, however, must have neglected this admonition, for Oxford during his reign smoldered as a center of Jacobite sympathies. Although the University had opposed James's interpretation of his powers, it was not yet ready because of that to shift its allegiance to a new king.

While Oxford, though outwardly acquiescing in the Revolution, was still Jacobite at heart—so much so that even in the middle of the century it was accused of wholesale dishonesty and unconsientiousness. There was within it a party of young men who manifested


their detestation of the Stuarts. On January 30, 1706, which the non-jurors would be observing as a day of humiliation, the anniversary of the martyrdom of their king, there was a riot at All Souls College. While fewer expressions of allegiance to the dynasty of the Revolution are to be found at Oxford, one cannot help but be impressed by the pains which the majority at Cambridge took to assure the Sovereigns of their loyalty. It does not appear that King William had much sympathy with either of the Universities. He had on one occasion thought of making a royal visit, but he was dissuaded from it by the legal advisors of the Crown.

It may have been owing to her womanly tact that his successor, Queen Anne, designed to visit Cambridge in 1705. She was received by lines of students with acclamations of Vivat Regina. Although only a small proportion of the High Church party at Cambridge were Jacobite—while such was not the case at Oxford—the change in parties which was going on throughout the reign of Queen Anne appears to have produced a considerable increase in the ranks of Tories at Cambridge.

At the death of Queen Anne in 1714, Oxford became more openly Jacobite and expressed its hostility to the new Hanoverian line in numerous unmistakable ways, including riots. Martial law was proclaimed in 1715, and a force of government cavalry was dispatched to maintain order in the city. Meanwhile Cambridge received a donation from the king of a considerable library—this state of affairs inspiring some student to poetic endeavors:

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.\(^1\)

Cambridge, although much more friendly to George I than was its rival university, shared enough of Oxford’s alleged other sins of sloth and lethargy to be included as a target of a spate of criticisms and demands for university reform published in pamphlet form in 1716 and 1717. One of these diatribes, in demanding a royal visit of the universities, argued that England’s future clergy were being trained in an atmosphere of perjured oaths, immorality, and disloyalty, but that, with royal intervention,

The Universities, those nests, or cages of unclean birds, would be effectually cleansed, the Church be honored with a learned, sober, pious, and laborious clergy, Religion would flourish, Virtue be encouraged, Wickedness fly, and be ashamed to show its face, a Protestant government be secured and established and God would delight to dwell among us.\(^2\)

By the time of the reign of George III, there had been working a radical change in the meaning of party names. When the possibility of the restoration of the Stuarts became extinct, the minds of the Tories were set free; and so the strong feeling of personal loyalty began to concentrate itself around George III. Here was an Englishman by birth, and a monarch by hereditary right, though derived from usurpation. The king was a man of great force of character and fair abilities, and one who could command respect. It was not surprising therefore that he was enabled to enlist the sympathies of the party of prerogative whose Toryism was now a habit


rather than a sentiment. Instead of attempting to suspend the laws which were affecting prerogative, the king made free use of patronage—a powerful influence over all parties in an age when the House of Commons was nominated by lords of boroughs headed by the king. The Tories as yet had with them, as they had had all along, the sympathies of the people. In the eighteenth century Whiggism was by no means popular, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the Whigs began attempting to enlist the power of public opinion on their side.

At no time perhaps was a shuffling and a changing of the suits of party easier than in the years which followed 1760. In the reigns of the first two Georges the most consistent Tories had found themselves doing the same work of opposition to the Crown as the more thorough and the less conservative of the Whigs. But as soon as George III had come to revive the flame of loyalty which was languishing for want of one to feed it, the ardor of the Tories was satisfied in him, and they became attached to him and his successors. Yet this was not done with the devotion of a first love, but rather in the more cautious spirit which had characterized the allegiance of the more moderate Whigs.

For the remainder of the century both universities became assimilated to the new Tory Party, the one from High Church Whiggism, the other from High Church Toryism, so that even at Cambridge by 1793, the friends of the first French Revolution were in such disfavor that even a Whig was scarcely to be found. It was not until the nineteenth century that the "evangelical" movement gained any strength at Cambridge, and then many of its members held High Church
Doctrine in the eighteenth-century use of the term, or that the "tractarian" school developed itself in Oxford.

It is sometimes assumed that the University of Cambridge in the eighteenth century led an isolated existence, remote from the stream of the national life, and that its numerous deficiencies were due to its immunity from external interference and its freedom to wallow in its sin. At least as long as the Duke of Newcastle was Chancellor of the University, the connection between the academic and political worlds, instead of being nonexistent, was in reality much too close and intimate to be salutary, and the university was very far from being left to itself. The abuses were many, but they were not exclusively of home manufacture, and the politicians must shoulder their portion of the blame. From 1748 until 1768 Cambridge had as its Chancellor that very typical eighteenth-century politician, Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, and any society over which Newcastle presided was not likely to lack opportunities of exercising its talents in the direction of intrigue and wire-pulling.¹

Perhaps it was this atmosphere of political intrigue permeating the university that caused the professors to feel uncertain of the future. As a result they sought to make the most of the present. For whatever be charged against the senior members of the university, they cannot be accused of neglecting their worldly interests, and Cambridge was not backward in that shameless hunt for places and preferments which is associated with the eighteenth century. As

long as the Duke of Newcastle remained in the service of the king and dispensed the crown's ecclesiastical patronage, he was constantly being reminded by his academic supporters of their claims to recognition. It was inevitable that many of these seekers after preferment should be disappointed, but it can be asserted that as long as Newcastle remained in office the claims of Cambridge were recognized in over-running measure. It was good to be a Whig in those days, but still better to be a Cambridge Whig, and best of all to be a Whig who had been educated at Westminster and Clare, the Duke's school and college. This hunger for advancement in the church had some unfortunate consequences. The university was not only familiarized with the most sordid side of contemporary political life, but also suffered in its independence. It was only natural that men, so anxious to receive, should be timorous of offending possible benefactors and unwilling to pay much attention to scruples which stood in the way of obedience to their patrons. There is at least a suspicion that impartiality in university and college examinations had to be abandoned to comply with the wishes of the great. Thus, in October 1757, the Duke of Newcastle wrote to Dr. Green, Master of Corpus, to recommend to his favorable attention Jonathon Davies, an undergraduate of King's College, who was thinking of competing for the Craven scholarship. The Duke wrote:

My Lord Hertford, a particular friend of mine, having desired me, as you will see by the enclosed note, to recommend Mr. Davies, who is represented to be a very ingenious young man, to your favor for the scholarship founded by Lord Craven, I should be much obliged to you if you would be so good as to assist him upon that occasion.  

Dr. Green did point out to the Duke that no Craven scholarship had yet been declared vacant, that, as the right of electing was confined to the Vice-Chancellor, the five Regius Professors and the Public Orator, he would not have a vote until he became Vice-Chancellor, and that "the candidates for this scholarship are examined with great care and it has been given, as far as I have been concerned in the disposal, to those who wanted it most and deserved it best." Then, having paid this tribute to the decencies, he proceeded to remark that "should this young man's character and improvements be found to answer, as I have no doubt but they will answer, the representation made to your Grace, I should with the utmost readiness and pleasure assist in choosing him."2

Yet, as long as many among the university authorities were dependent on the great, it was difficult to prevent the great from intervening. It must not be imagined that the practice originated with or was confined to the Duke of Newcastle. As Chancellor he was closely in touch with the authorities of the university and therefore favorably situated to exercise an influence; but he was certainly not the only nobleman who commended a candidate for a scholarship or fellowship to the favorable consideration of the examiners and electors. But, even if the university had been immune from outside interference, it is unlikely that all would have been well; for jobbery had taken a strong hold in this age and was by no means a monopoly of politicians.


2Ibid., p. 13
Since the academic and political worlds had become so closely connected, the party divisions at Cambridge had come to more or less correspond with those at Westminster. Such a connection was almost inevitable as long as the power of a statesman depended to a great extent upon the amount of patronage at his disposal. It is not surprising that the average Cambridge don was keenly desirous to be on the winning side in politics, for unless he was skilled in seeing which way the political wind was likely to blow and steering his course accordingly, he had little chance of obtaining the preferment he coveted. It is as little surprising that politicians sought to enlarge the number of their followers by establishing a connection with the university which would enable them to influence the disposal of academic posts. Doubtless the prizes of university life were small in comparison with the rich sinecures for which politicians competed; but eighteenth-century statesmen were not particular in their methods of accumulating patronage. And as the obvious way of establishing an influence in the university was by becoming its Chancellor, eminent statesmen were frequently eager competitors for that office. Consequently, when this place fell vacant, the parliamentary contest was apt to be extended to Cambridge and academic peace to be rudely disturbed by the clash of rival political parties.

Thus university and national politics were closely connected; and neither the nation nor the university profited. The higher interests of the university were not advanced by its Chancellor being

a politician who would be tempted to be principally interested in extending the influence of his party, and no advantage accrued to the nation from an increase of the means of bribery and corruption at the disposal of a statesman. The connection was certainly unfortunate and the responsibility for it partly rests upon that master in the art of corruption, Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle. Until comparatively lately Newcastle has been depicted as an industrious nonentity whose only weapon was treachery; but a more complete analysis is needed to explain the fact that this seemingly contemptible person proved more than a match for many of the ablest politicians of his time. From the fall of Sir Robert Walpole until the death of George II, Newcastle exercised a parliamentary influence which made his support indispensable to any administration.

The secret of his success is not difficult to discover. Undistinguished as an orator, inefficient as an administrator, and deplorably deficient in all the higher arts of statesmanship, he triumphed by uniting a sincere and entirely disinterested passion for public life with a frank and cynical appreciation of the politics of his age. Understanding that bribery and corruption were the acknowledged weapons of politicians, he took full advantage of his position as a servant of the crown and used the vast resources of the royal patronage to win and maintain a personal following in Parliament which made him independent of the favor of the king and the confidence of the country. He bestowed places in church and state with a lavish though discriminating hand, and became a power in the

land by playing upon the weakness of his fellow creatures.¹

There is no reason, however, to think that when in 1737 Newcastle appeared as a candidate for the office of High Steward, the university realized that it was being asked to place itself under the control of the greatest living exponent of the art of jobbery. Though Newcastle had been a Secretary of State for thirteen years, he was overshadowed in the cabinet and in the country by the prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole. It was not until Walpole's fall from office, five years later, that his power became apparent. It was moreover natural and in the order of things that a university, which was predominantly, though not exclusively, Whig should desire to confer a distinction upon a prominent Whig minister who was also a Cambridge man. Furthermore, there does not seem to have been any serious opposition to the Duke's candidature.² Though he had little or no interest in learning or education, he desired to become the head of a learned society in order that he might convert it into a stronghold of his party and increase his means of rewarding his followers. As Chancellor he would be consulted in the disposal of professorships and the other prizes of academic life, and therefore his political creed would commend itself to those who might need his favor. Newcastle's candidature was inspired by the same motives, and it was therefore as leaders of rival political parties that he and his rivals for the office of Chancellor contended for the suffrage of the members of the Senate. Neither they nor those to whom

¹Denys A. Winstanley, The University of Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 120.

²Ibid., p. 45.
they appealed thought overmuch of the interests of the university, and the struggle was almost as purely political as a party contest in the House of Commons.\(^1\)

Another significant cause for the decline of the eighteenth-century university was the individualism which arose as a result of the philosophy of this Age of Reason—the Enlightenment. This individualism came into its own especially as a consequence of the restrictions which the government placed on the professors. Many found this situation intolerable and the outcome was the beginnings of a new society of dissenting academies. Here they escaped the political intrigues and rigid structure of the university and could seek fulfillment in their scholastic endeavors with the utmost creativity and originality.

The Act of Uniformity in 1662 restricted membership of the English universities to members of the Established Church. This was soon followed by acts of the same nature. All teachers who would not take the required oaths were expelled. With the best teachers leaving and many inadequate ones filling in, naturally the quality of university education had to suffer. As a result student numbers fell and discipline deteriorated. In 1660 a new and monumental challenge to the whole system of university education appeared. Some forty men of learning who were particularly interested in science agreed to hold regular meetings together in London. Two years later the group became incorporated as the Royal Society. Despite the opposition of the universities this institution had from the

start an irresistible attraction for eminent scholars, and, profiting largely from the university expulsions, the Royal Society quickly became the national center of scientific experiment and research.\(^1\)

In 1675 Charles Morton opened at Stoke Newington in London the first of the "Dissenting Academies," and this was quickly copied all over the country. Staffed in their earlier days largely by teachers who had been expelled from the universities, the Academies at their best gave an education of university quality, often in a wider range of subjects and in a manner better calculated to serve the needs of the age.\(^2\)

It further seems to be the case that the waning of the influence of the university in the course of time was due in large part to the loss of freedom. As the university obtained endowments and buildings, as their governing bodies became organized, they lost their spontaneity and creative leadership. The great philosophers, scholars, and men of science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries worked in large measure outside the university. Bacon, Hobbes, Locke and Berkeley; Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz; Harvey, Huygens, Linnaeus and Lamarck were not university professors or not primarily such. The men of science of the eighteenth century worked largely in connection with the academies of science and in the newly formed museums, observatories, and botanical gardens. There was too much dogmatism, formalism, discipline, routine, control—it might have been called efficiency if they had had the word in those days.


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 43.
Scientific men found greater freedom and stimulus in the academies, which, though under the patronage of the court, they themselves controlled.¹

It is amazing to note the medieval universities were so extraordinarily unhierarchical, democratic, anarchic in their organization. The university was then the professors and the students—they went as far in unexplored territory as their ingenuity and invention would allow. The professors had complete control of the conditions under which degrees were given and in the selection of their colleagues and successors. There was an elected council and rectors were elected for a year or for some other short period. Only later was there a single rector for the entire studium. The paraphernalia of the modern university—endowments, buildings and grounds, trustees and president, heads of departments and deans, curricula, grades and examinations—were absent or subordinated. There were indeed many forms of routine, customs, and limitations, but the university, in an age of feudalism and of absolutism of state and church, attained a remarkable freedom, and its great performance was in large measure due to this freedom.² With the complex hierarchical structure of the eighteenth-century university, it became very difficult to rectify those situations which were inhibiting the growth of the university. The right to amend the seventeenth-century statutes had been won in 1760, but the conservative forces were so strong that reformation was only a possibility when

²Ibid., p. 6.
the head and shoulders took the initiative. The head and shoulders consisted of Hebdomadal Board, comprising the Vice-Chancellor, the Proctors, and the Heads of the Colleges. Behind the Hebdomadal Board there was the democratic but reactionary body of all those, resident and non-resident, who kept their names on the books of any college. This body, the Convocation, had the ultimate voice in all major issues; its composition was almost entirely clerical and its vote overwhelmingly against reform. But while academic conservatism remained vigorous, its vigor was born rather of torpor than of any attachment to principle. A heavy burden of inertia prevailed in every sphere. The existing system, so wrote Vicesimus Knox, a fellow of St. John's, was "so futile and absurd, as to deserve not only the severity of censure but the utmost poignancy of ridicule."¹

The rationalism and self-confidence of the men of the eighteenth century led them to despise or at least to neglect, classical antiquity. They felt they had nothing to learn from the ancients in regard to science and philosophy, and therefore they ceased to regard the universities, which were still largely devoted to classical studies, as places of the first importance. As for Europe, the universities and schools suffered from the same contempt as Aristotle, to whom they still adhered; they were considered as institutions which had remained behind the times, and where nothing was taught but disputation and idle talk, certainly not any true science. With similar feelings the courtier looked upon the humanistic schools, and upon Latin poetry and eloquence, as taught there:

obsolete arts which had ceased to be of any earthly use in real life. This contempt for the ancient university studies was not the rule in England, where Oxford and Cambridge still exercised a social ascendency among the well-to-do classes, and when a vigorous Parliamentary life put a premium upon oratory and, to some extent, on polite learning. On the Continent, however, Parliaments were dead or in decay, and the universities had never enjoyed any social prestige. In England the well brought up young gentleman was expected to attend the university as a matter of course. Then he would absorb additional culture and wisdom in a Grand Tour of the Continent, many spots such as Venice and Paris becoming almost overrun with these young "gentlemen" on tour. After all of this, society then thought him ready to enter into the world as a full-fledged adult member. Oxford and Cambridge thus tended to be regarded as places where gentlemen, other than sailors and soldiers, should pass the years from nineteen to twenty-two. They had the merit, however, according to Madame de Staël, of providing the young men who were to be orators and statesmen with a particularly useful equipment. "The English universities have singularly contributed to spread among the English that knowledge of ancient languages and literature which gives the orators and statesmen of England such liberal and brilliant instruction." 2

There were some men of this time who professed to be cosmopolitans, deliberately citizens of the world, such as Gibbon, Rousseau, Mowat, The Age of Reason (London: George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 30.

2 Ibid., p. 241.
Edward Gibbon learned to be a European by passing the most impressionable period of life, the age from sixteen to twenty-one, in the home of a pastor at Lausanne. Preceding his time at Lausanne he had been an undergraduate at Magdalen College, Oxford, from which his father had removed him owing to a (temporary) conversion to Roman Catholicism. He wrote in his Autobiography:

> If my childish revolt against the religion of my country had not stripped me in time of my academic gown, the five important years, so liberally improved in the studies and conversation of Lausanne, would have been steeped in port and prejudice among the monks of Oxford.\(^1\)

Throughout this paper it has been pointed out that theology, politics, and conviviality were the absorbing interests at the universities in the eighteenth century. Although learning is often considered to be at low ebb at this time, classical and antiquarian learning were definitely not forgotten even in the dullest days. Although the proposals for reform proved to be ineffectual, critics did not cease to urge the need of maintaining university studies. The suggestions put forth by Dean Prideaux and Lord Macclesfield in 1715 and 1718 would have tightened college discipline all around. They would have remodeled the rules for Fellowships, limiting their tenure to twenty years. Statutory powers might be created for revising College Statutes and elections, a board of arbitration to settle college quarrels, an organized body of tutors with definite duties to perform. Rules could be framed to cure political disaffection, to keep down expenditure, to help poor scholars, to check illiteracy in candidates for ordination, incompetence in those who

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wore "Lawyer's Gowns." Macclesfield's scheme urged the development of teaching in science, in mathematics, and in the Law of Nature and of Nations.¹

Although there were critics of almost every aspect of the university system, there seems to have been no vigorous demands for a change in curriculum. Few voices within the University of Oxford at any rate seem to have suggested any reconsideration of the teaching of the past. In science, while Cambridge was learning to understand the genius of Sir Issac Newton, Oxford had allowed itself to fall behind. David Gregory, Savilian Professor of Astronomy from 1691 to 1708, exerted himself to give life to mathematical studies. He brought out an edition of Euclid and attempted to elucidate practical geometry by a lecture on "the five orders of pillars and pilasters." Gregory had brought Newtonian ideas from Scotland, but they were not too graciously received by the Oxford men. The days when Oxford gave a lead to science seemed in the eighteenth century, unlikely to return. Classics, logic, and philosophy were still the favorite studies of Oxford, but it cannot be said that they showed much vigorous development as the century went on. The classical authors stood unchallenged—Terence and Xenophon, Cicero, Virgil, Homer, Euripides, Horace, and many more. Logic was still supreme at Oxford and the classical tradition was unbroken. In ethics Aristotle had no serious rival, though it may be doubted whether the study of Aristotle was really comprehensive or profound. Locke was read with some caution and reserve. The Code which Archbishop Laud

had revised and handed on from the Middle Ages was still supposed to govern Oxford education in Dr. Johnson's day.¹

Dr. Richard Newton was one of the most vigorous of the early eighteenth-century reformers and founder of Hertford College. He set to work in 1710 as Principal of Hart Hall agitating for conversion of the Hall into a College. In 1739 he finally secured the Royal Charter and Hertford College was founded, with Newton as Principal plus four Tutors. Newton's Statutes involved new standards which were to make education a reality. Principal and tutors were to lecture regularly. Disputations, genuine exercises in philosophy and theology, were fixed for certain days each week and collections were to check the student's progress every year. In a day when university requirements were either singularly easy or rarely enforced, Dr. Newton was free to vary his system and to make it very much what he pleased. In theory his scheme required that each of his four tutors should train eight undergraduates for a degree in Arts, and most of them were intended to take Orders. But in fact the College came to consist chiefly of gentleman commoners. Dr. Newton had the fine faith of a reformer. He would have stimulated work at Oxford, have regulated undergraduate expenses, have insisted on more discipline and simplicity of life. And even in the eighteenth century his counsels were not without effect.²

Thus one can see that even at this early date the need for reform was not altogether neglected. As the years progressed the de-

² Ibid., p. 129.
mand for a real examination system was slowly gaining ground. The Laudian Code of Oxford with its provisions for lectures, disputations, studies, the system of government, and rules of discipline, still dominated university life. Time had done little to modify its processes, though the right to alter and amend the Laudian statutes was asserted after a struggle in 1760. The controversy of 1759 and 1760 was over two new Statutes, one defining the members of the Convocation, the other explaining the prohibition against simultaneous enjoyment of privileges in the university and the city. Under the operation of the Laudian Code, the Hebdomadal Board, the Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, and Heads of Houses had become more and more the ruling influence in the university. The old Congregation of Regents, with no power to control the decisions of the Board, had become principally concerned with the granting of dispensations and degrees. The Convocation, though depending for its initiative on the Hebdomadal Board, had become more than ever the supreme authority. Its reserves of voters included all Regents in Arts whose names were on the books of any College or Hall, and they could always be called in to determine large issues. With this provision the most controversial matters could be settled by the interference of non-resident voters. The printed Code was meant to help revive the memory of Laud's educational system, the old rules insisting upon disputations as the test of learning, and newer rules calling for a genuine viva voce examination, conducted by the Regent Masters. But it also helped to remind the Oxford teachers under King George III how far the system in existence had deteriorated from the old ideals. And more than one voice was raised to expose
the futility of the exercises still maintained and the distressing stagnation into which the university had allowed itself to settle.¹

One of these voices was that of John Napleton, who was determined to raise the standard of university education, and in 1773 he published anonymously some interesting Considerations on the Public Exercises. Napleton set out the formal conditions with which Bachelors and Masters had to comply in order to gain their degrees. In his writing Napleton pointed out very poignantly the deficiencies of the requirements of the established system. He pointed out its inadequacy and its decay. He found the questions trite, the disputations languid, the examinations robbed of their old publicity and degenerated into farce. Supervision was often entirely wanting, some of the old conditions were habitually neglected, and many of the old exercises had sunk into lifeless formalities. In repairing these imperfections Napleton would have gone to the root of the matter by making the examinations real—tests that required a certain degree of academic proficiency. Dates would be fixed for the examinations and he insisted on a considerable amount of proficiency for them. They would be held in the presence of the Congregation in the theatre or the schools.²

But Napleton was not the only critic by any means—Vicesimus Knox, a well-known and popular essayist of St. John’s College, described a system which he looked upon as disgraceful. He maintained that disputations might sound like a formidable ordeal, but upon in-

²Ibid., p. 214.
spection they are shown to be the barest of formalities. Knox rather stringently pointed out that the first and most important step upon beginning preparations was to secure a copy of the arguments which had been passed down among the students for generations, consisting of "foolish syllogisms on foolish subjects." Then on the actual day for the disputation the two opponents went into the empty hall and read a book or carved their names on the desks for two hours, usually never bothering with even the formality of presenting some arguments on their assigned subjects. Knox admitted that the disputation would be useful if they had not always been carelessly performed. He boldly requested the Prime Minister to call in Parliament to revise the statutes and customs of the university; to abolish useless and antiquated forms; to alter and diminish the oaths required; to insist on longer residence; more discipline; less luxury; to put down the privileges of Gentlemen Commoners; to increase the duties and pay of college tutors—in effect, to make the education offered at Oxford worthy of the name.

Though this system continued to provoke more opposition as the years passed, it was not until 1800 that effective action was finally taken. At this time the long-debated New Examination Statute received the assent of the Congregation. An examination was imposed on Masters as well as Bachelors of Arts, and the examiners were sworn to take their duties seriously, to set aside all fear or favor, to give no testimonial to an unworthy candidate, and to refuse


none to a worthy one. The statute declared that "it is a most desirable and momentous object that as many members of the University as possible, of all orders and degrees, should be present at the examinations."¹ In order to insure the utmost publicity and attendance, it was required that every candidate who applied for examination for himself must have previously been present at the examination of others. In addition to the regular examinations, an Honors Examination at Oxford was established which reported to the Congregation those students who had made outstanding progress in the elements of religion, in the arts and sciences, and in humane literature. Such a practice could provide the students with a stimulus to probe the higher levels of learning, of research—to reach out for something more. But with every change that tightened or improved the system, the authorities, remembering the mildness of earlier days, reminded the young community of candidates that a spirit of indulgence would always be present in their hearts. With such an attitude prevailing, the aims of the new statutes could never be realized; no real change could be made until the attitudes of the professors had substantially shifted.²

The men who did manage to help raise the standard of university education raised instead the standard of their own colleges. One of the most prominent of these was Dean Cyril Jackson of Christ Church. He had a great company of the university's most high-spirited young men to deal with, but Jackson had the ability to stimulate industry

²Ibid., p. 176.
as well as to discipline the most unmanageable class of undergraduates. The primary policies under his rule were to reward merit, choose the best tutors for the College, and keep up the level of teaching and examination. Jackson was constantly entertaining and encouraging his students, and they repaid him with unstinted admiration. This intense involvement with his students, evidenced by the deep impression he made on his surroundings, shows that there were definitely some exceptions to the indifference shown by Oxford personnel toward the students.¹

As there occurred a rising demand for reform, so also was there a rising demand for freedom in opinion during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Lovers of toleration found it difficult to defend a system which imposed subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles not only on the clergy of the Church of England but on Nonconformist ministers and university students as well. The petition of 1772 for relief from this obligation found strong support at Cambridge and in Parliament, while Oxford identified itself with the resistance. Pamphlets were circulated at Oxford on the one side explaining the impropriety of lay subscription and on the other side insisting on the need of guarding against the two great factions of papists and Puritans, the latter vindicating subscription on the ground that it meant little more than a general assurance of loyalty to the Church. At that time the opposition carried the day in Parliament, but the demand for relief continued and in the case of Nonconformist ministers and teachers it became too strong to be denied. In 1779 they

were admitted to the benefits of the Toleration Act without being compelled to subscribe to the Articles. The law may have been passed, but the opposition against it at Oxford was still strong, the Convocation even sending up a petition against the Bill. As the years passed more liberal forces came very near to attaining success in establishing such policies, but the coming of the French Revolution strengthened Oxford's unalterable dread of change.¹

In more closely examining the issue of religious liberalism and its crisis in 1772, it must be realized that the Established Churchmen were not merely struggling to score a debating point, but were sincerely concerned over the effect of the defection of the Dissenters. Only two years before, the great controversy between the liberal and the orthodox theologians, which had never completely died away since its first great eruption at the beginning of the century, had broken out with fresh violence upon the publication of Blackburne's Confessional. The orthodox took their stand on the ground that the articles of the Church were in no sense contrary to reason and that Protestantism was the religion of the Bible, which could itself be rationally demonstrated to be the Word of God. Unhappily for the orthodox, the liberals were able to establish firstly that from an arithmetical point of view the doctrine that the Godhead was a unity of three persons was not a mystery above reason but a patent absurdity, and secondly that the doctrine was not contained in the Bible at all. Blackburne not only re-stated these arguments with great vigor, but brought another old argument

to the forefront of the debate. He claimed that Arians and liberals asked for no more latitude in subscribing trinitarian articles than orthodox Arminians habitually obtained in subscribing articles which he vehemently asserted were Calvinistic in tendency.¹

Thus the articles to which the University of Oxford required subscription at both matriculation and graduation were assailed as relics of a barbarous past; and the whole Anglican ascendancy was questioned as the liberal dissenters exploited the controversy to demand exemption from the subscription to articles the bearing of which was so evidently disputed in the Church. Worse still, the liberals argued that if Oxford rationalism had led to the expulsion of the evangelicals it should logically lead to the abolition of the present subscription, so strained by rationalists, Arminian or Arian. Certainly the one party to the controversy with an easy conscience was the group of Calvinistic evangelicals. Possessed by a vivid sense of being caught up in the sovereign purposes of God, they were impervious to the intellectual questionings of the liberals; they championed the articles as the truth rather than the arbitrary requirement of State or Church. In addition they possessed a conviction that the articles were the truth abjured by the orthodox, and unknown to the liberals. Liberal arguments that the doctrine of original sin was an imposture of unscrupulous priests had no effect upon men overwhelmed by the sense that by grace they had been delivered from nothing less. Moreover, on the grand article of predestination, which increasingly occupied the forefront of controversy,

they had stood zealously firm from the beginning. They were secure in the knowledge that in some shape this doctrine was at the core of the biblical testimony, however hard it might be to demonstrate all the Calvinistic refinements to which they were attached.¹

For a period of time Oxford writers maintained an uneasy silence before this invitation to choose between orthodoxy and rationalism. It was easier for them to point out the failings of the liberals than to find a positive defense of subscription as then required. They were extremely cautious of the use of the only reputable defense, that the articles were a fair summary of the truth, and perhaps they already suspected what is now clear—that the intellectual premises which they shared with their liberal opponents made a convincing defense of the Trinity and other doctrines practically impossible, and that on the ground chosen the liberal case was bound to appear stronger.²

In the spring and summer of 1771, however, events compelled the Oxford leaders to come off the fence, for the Feathers Tavern Association was formed to petition Parliament for relief from clerical subscription, and great numbers of the dissenters also began to agitate for further relief. A lively agitation against academic subscriptions was begun at Cambridge, and the whole question was thoroughly aired in the press. In the violent press campaign a professor insisted upon the New Testament requirement that those who taught should be sound in the faith, a requirement met by subscrip-

²Ibid., p. 256.
tion to the articles. He added that no subscription was required of laymen, and there was no compulsion to enter the ministry; although there was much clamor about the hardship suffered by those whose views changed after they had taken orders, he believed that instances of starving, conscientious non-subscribers were rare. Not only was there nothing Popish about the requirement of uniformity from ministers, there was nothing Calvinistic about the articles themselves, for the framers had been influenced by the moderate standpoint of the Confession of Augsburg.¹ In all this there was nothing new, or any serious effort to meet the anti-trinitarian position, but by the beginning of 1772 the main center of interest had shifted from the press to the House of Commons. Despite some distinguished academic support at Cambridge, the promoters of the Feathers Tavern petition encountered a substantial reluctance to sign on the part of the liberal clergy, and in the end mustered only about 250 signatures, including those of a considerable number of laymen. Their lack of support in the House of Commons was shown up similarly with the defeat of the petition by a vote of 217 to 71. Yet the liberals were well pleased with the debate which had taken place in the House over the issue, and, in a sense, the whole high-church party and the University of Oxford as a corporate body were now deeper in trouble. The petitioners' defeat in the House was said to have been decided by supporters of the Treasury who seemed to have little interest in the merits of the case, and in any event the petitioners had attracted wider support among the influential

laymen than among the clergy. Furthermore, both sides of the debate had agreed that the requirement of subscription for the entrants and graduates of the University was a shameful and glaring evil, and it had been urged against the petitioners that they should have applied first to the universities for relief.¹

From the time of the Feathers Tavern Petition academic subscriptions had become a very hotly debated public issue. Finally two meetings were held by the Heads of the Colleges, the outcome of which was that on February 19, 1772, the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford was officially informed that the Cambridge heads considered they had no authority to alter the statutes, though they saw no danger in abolishing subscription for those graduating as Bachelors of Arts. In June, after the best legal opinion had ruled that the University was competent to alter the statutes, the Senate nevertheless decided, to the disgust of liberals and petitioning undergraduates, to concede only that graduates of arts, instead of subscribing to the Articles, should declare themselves members of the Church of England as by established law. Thus the die was then cast at Cambridge; if there was to be any radical academic initiative in the matter of subscription, it must come from Oxford.²

The conservatives at Oxford protested that the attack upon University subscription was an attack upon the outer line of defense of the fortress of the religious establishment. They insisted that


subscription at matriculation only implied acquiescence in, as dis-
tinct from assent to, the doctrines, and, of course, the University
really did not have the power to repeal the statutes. Near the end
of April 1772, the papers which had been circulating in the Uni-
sity were published in pamphlet form, and as a collection were com-
mented upon in another pamphlet. This pamphleteer was entirely in
favor of maintaining Oxford as an Anglican preserve, but since the
papers had proved that there were not two persons in the whole Uni-
versity who understood the matter of the Subscriptions in the same
sense, he believed it would be better to require the matriculants
simply to declare that they were members of the Church of England
and would conform to its liturgy and worship—the very solution
which had been adopted at Cambridge. Once again the dissenters
went to Parliament and, despite their efforts, were once again de-
feated.
Summary

In reviewing the problems of higher education in eighteenth-century England, a list of major deficiencies and inequities can be easily amassed. Among the weaknesses there are two factors which must bear the main portion of the responsibility for the decline of the university system. Foremost would be the political turmoil of the previous century which had created an atmosphere of moral laxity within the universities; it then became a simple matter for the eighteenth-century politicians to exercise their power and influence in the world of the universities. These politicians seemed to delight in any opportunity to manipulate the choice of candidates for either administrative offices or teaching positions. In addition the King and Parliament often regarded Cambridge and Oxford as subversive forces and attempted to squelch any threatening activities through the enactment of laws requiring various oaths of loyalty by most members of the university communities. With such conditions prevailing it was not long before the better professors felt their only honorable course of action was to leave the university.

The question then arises—would this decision to leave have been common or expected in any century or was it more understandable in the eighteenth century? There is a strong possibility that this decision was more widespread as a result of the very dominant philosophy of the age—the Age of Reason. The Enlightenment philosophy and its strong emphasis on the individual had made it virtually impossible for the more sensitive and intelligent men of the age to
survive under the philosophy of *conformity* in the universities. There was also an increasingly wider world and opportunities for intellectual contacts and pursuits than earlier centuries had known. Therefore one can see that the initial decline came as a consequence of political interference, but it might have been much less devastating if not for the forceful influence of the Enlightenment philosophy.

Some other prominent forces accounting for the decline of university learning were the appointments of professors to teach subjects of which they were largely ignorant, the indolence of many college tutors, the fact that many professors never even attempted to lecture or conduct a class of any sort, an elaborate examination system which had become a mere formality, a disturbing number of students who spent the major portion of their college years in idle-ness and dissolute living, and highly inadequate library facilities. These and other components comprised a university system which has been largely degraded by twentieth-century scholars and those of the eighteenth century as well. Mediocrities do play their part in society and in this capacity the universities attempted to fill the need for higher education. Although properly condemned for their inadequacies, the universities should also receive credit for the good that they did accomplish in the field of education during the eighteenth century. Perhaps the best judgment that can be made of this period is that while the universities were not of high quality, they remained institutions, and in rather indistinct form they did encourage some attempts at intellectual achievement.
Selected Bibliography


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