

Advertiser December 24th 1885

OUR UNIVERSITY.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—The unemployed sensation has nearly played itself out for the present. A new one came to the front last week, occasioned by the University Commemoration Day. On Wednesday the *Register* growled in a small subleader of questionable taste, and on Thursday it threw a shell at the devoted head of the council, and damned the whole affair. "Much ado about nothing," the article says. A big price for very small returns is the burden of its cry. Its words are, "that a University should at the end of a year's work be able to present only two students who have passed the Arts course must be taken as proving either that the work is badly done or that there is not enough work to do." Simple-minded people like your correspondent were shocked when they read this sentence, but were even more shocked when they learned the whole facts of the case. It is a pity the whole truth was not stated. Six students obtained degrees on the occasion, during the session eighty-nine students pursued their studies with a view to graduation, eighty-eight without any such intention, and a minimum number of fifty attended the evening courses of lectures. Surely "Arts" is not the only purpose the University fulfils. Most people will agree with me in saying that this is a brilliant result, having regard to the age of the University and the size of our community. But when a writer is unwilling to disclose the whole truth you may be sure he has an object to serve. The whole truth would not answer his purpose. And in this instance the purpose lies patent to the reader's eyes. If the results of the year's work is so lamentable as put in this article, I am at perfect liberty to ask what are the teaching staff about? The article anticipates any such natural enquiry, and immediately it has raised its dolorous cry, assures the public that no fault must be found with the professors; oh! dear no, for "these men have approved themselves worthy of high honor." It is rather odd that for so small an occasion so much glory should be trailed across the sky. Is it possible that the professors have a lurking suspicion that some one might ask, why so much cry and so little wool? Or is it rather the one streak of light which, in the mind of the writer, is to bring out in bolder relief the malign influence which is at the bottom of the whole thing. By the way, the public have not heard much of this "high honor." Certainly Professor Lamb bore himself well in this respect, but he is gone to reap laurels in another field. We have not heard of honors much beyond this. The shell bursts in the following sentence:—"A University, to be what its name implies, must be governed by men who know what higher education is, and generally speaking, who have themselves experienced the benefits of a University training." Ah! this is why only two students passed in Arts. Not the want of energy on the part of the professors, but because the chancellor, the treasurer, and other two members of the august body called the council, have not the higher education, and never enjoyed a University training. If I had not been solemnly informed of the fact I confess

the malign influence of such a circumstance in debarring a large number of students from going in for "Arts" would not have struck me. But I suppose in some occult way the council must affect the students, seeing the council deliberates once a month, while the professors talk directly to them every day. The explanation of failure, if failure must be admitted, must be found elsewhere. I would not even suggest incompetence in the teachers, because it would not be true, but I would remind them that if no magnetism exists in the chair none will be found on the bench. Enthusiasm plays a powerful part in every true student's life.

The attack upon the University is directed towards the governing body, the front of whose offence is "that (if) men, however great their abilities and estimable their character who know nothing of what a University should be, are endowed with the supreme control, the result can hardly fail to be disappointing." Why? It is suggested that the answer is self-evident. Quite as self-evident as the fact that because a large number of pupils from various schools failed to pass their matriculation examination therefore no reflection must be thrown upon the teachers who sent them up, but with the governing body of the school must the blame rest. It is curious no doubt to read such profound researches into causes, but without going very deep the proposition will look as true to most people as it does to me. I have sufficient confidence in the public discernment to believe it will put the saddle on the right horse, notwithstanding the elegant flourish with which we are told that the professors are "men who have approved themselves worthy of high honor." It is not kind of the *Register* to remind some of these high functionaries of their ignorance of "higher education," and yet tell them it has not forgotten their "great abilities and estimable characters." However much it may grieve these unfortunate gentlemen, possessed as they are of "great abilities and estimable characters," to be made so pointedly aware that their disabilities are of a character which the *Register* cannot approve of, still it has a duty to perform, even though it should shed a sympathetic tear over the suffering it inflicts. Let these men take a back seat, let them disappear from

the horizon of the "higher education," and let their places be taken by men who possess the sole qualification for guiding the new life of a young University. It is possible to successfully run a newspaper, even without one member of its staff having ever bent his head beneath the mighty portals of an Alma Mater; but that any man should be found acting as treasurer to a University council without a "University training," however "great his abilities or estimable his character," is preposterous on the face of it.

Not only does the article eulogise the professors as a body of men "worthy of high honor," but it sententiously applauds Professor Kelly's performance on commemoration day. Possibly the professor does not like it. The "higher education," which always brings in its train "sweetness and light," may interfere with his enjoyment of such flattery. At any rate we are duly informed that his address was of a character so pregnant with wisdom that "if the Adelaide University were conducted on the lines laid down in this address there would be more reason to speak well of it for what it has done in the past, and greater reason for hopefulness on account of what it is bound to do in the future." I turned with avidity to the address, for who could read such a sentence and remain indifferent to the solution of this great problem. I have failed to catch the "lines," and sadder still, the article does not help me. I have, however, caught something in the midst of many beautiful sentences which shapes itself as two simple propositions. The first is, as the article puts it—"It is in no wise part of a university to act primarily as advertising agents for outside educational institutions." This is a cruel way of characterising the honest enthusiasm which prevails in our large schools and colleges to test by independent means the attainments of their pupils. To take advantage of the matriculation examination is a perfectly justifiable thing for such a purpose. It attracts towards the University, and it tends to exalt the quality of the education obtainable in these educational institutions. This is evidently a sore point with the professor, as well as the writer of the article. I would not ask to turn the University to any base use, even although the public contribute well to its support, and have a perfect right to exact some concession, still the matriculation serves a purpose which nothing else in our educational system can do. It may seem uncharitable to say that a diminution of the number of candidates for matriculation would lessen the irksome labor of the professors, but it is equally a matter of questionable taste for them to insist upon a point with which their own interests are so intimately concerned. There is likewise another aspect of this question worth looking at. On all hands I hear the bitter complaint made that the successes in the matriculation examination this year were few and the failures many. If professors hold so strongly that matriculation is but a means of advertising for other educational institutions, seeing they have the setting of the examination papers, they certainly expose themselves to the suspicion of making the results of the examination carry out their own private views. They alone have the power to place such obstacles in the way of passing as will effectually checkmate what I hold to be on the part of our large schools

and colleges, an honorable aspiration of their best pupils. But this article in the *Register* insists upon telling us all the while that the governing body, seeing a few of its members do not take their place among the *kaloi kai agathoi* of their generation, is the occasion of the failure to induce students to pass on to a higher grade. It is quite evident that the sooner our University becomes a respectable antiquated old lady, the sooner will its teaching staff be satisfied. Apparently the sooner Dugald Stewart's words apply to it the better: "The academical establishments of some parts of Europe are not without their use to the historian of the human mind. Im-movably moored to the same station by the strength of their cables and the weight of their anchors, they enable him to measure the rapidity of the current by which the rest of the world is borne along." A rather limited but still highly antiquated purpose to fulfil. I trust the Adelaide University is more in harmony with the true spirit of the day than to serve as a beacon of stupidity.

The second proposition is, that in the matriculation examination Greek should be as compulsory as Latin, that is, every pupil leaving our large schools should go laden with two dead languages instead of one. If it were a mere quarrel between Latin and Greek, as to which should be compulsory, I would say let them fight it out, but when it amounts to the compulsory addition of another dead language, however beautiful it may be, the question is one of serious moment. A philosopher will be able to discern the unquestionable fact that two leading characteristics are generally shown by students—one is a language bent, the other a science or mathematical bent. But Greek professors are not usually philosophers, and seem kindly intent on insisting that every student shall drink at the same delectable fountain as themselves, whether he will or not. Breadth and sympathy are warmly eulogised by the professor as the outcome of Greek studies; but I fear the breadth is to know something that most people don't know, and the sympathy is with a dead ideal past. The