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AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES.

"A NEW HUMANISM."

SYDNEY PROFESSOR'S IMPRESSIONS.

Professor Irvine, of the newly-established Chair of Economics and Commerce at Sydney University, has not long returned from a trip abroad, on which he saw a good deal of the big universities of Canada and the United States. He gave (says the Sydney "Daily Telegraph") an account of his impressions in a hitherto unreported lecture to the University Union the other day. Being those of an expert, and an Australian who travelled as a learner and with an open mind, they should be interesting, not only because of their indirect bearing upon our own Universities, but also from the light they throw upon the much-talked-about tendencies of higher education in America.

As Professor Irvine sums things up, what struck him finally about American Universities was their friendliness, the catholicity of their conception of learning, the absence of priggishness and exclusiveness in their attitude to the non-university world. "Taken as a whole," he says, "they exist for the people. They serve all classes and all legitimate interests without distinction. Their aim is to democratise the knowledge of the few and make it the possession of the many, and they are not ashamed of being dubbed utilitarian when their efforts have doubled the yield of wheat or improved the government of cities. I believe that these American Universities, by taking part in the life of the people and serving their common end, are developing a new kind of humanism, which is going to be broader and richer, kindlier than the humanism of the past."

The Value of American Degrees.

Professor Irvine begins by clearing away a prejudice. In so big a country as America, with so miscellaneous a population, it is only natural that there should be many institutions which will not bear examination. But there are also a dozen or more American Universities which can hold their own with any in the world. And these institutions contain just as many scholarly, well-trained men as can be found in older academic centres. Universities in America require almost as much capital, equipment, and business skill to run as the most complicated billion-dollar trust. But this enormous expenditure represents a great deal more than display; it expresses the thoroughly practical yet profound belief of the people of America in education. There are ten American Universities, each with more than 3,000 students; six with more than 5,000; one (Columbia) with close on 7,000. Several are preparing for a student population of 10,000. The 14 great universities have altogether more than 60,000 students. It would seem that everybody in America must at some time or other have been to college! But, of course, a great many of these institutions fail to reach the American conception of a university, and would rank with us little higher than secondary schools.

Benevolent Millionaires.

The endowments of the great American Universities are pretty startling. Here are a few incomes:—Columbia, £441,500; Chicago, £379,951; Harvard, £305,557; Illinois, £338,301; California, £283,461. And, says the professor, a small university like the Johns Hopkins, with a student roll little more than half Sydney's, has an income greater than Sydney's by £3,000. Huge sums are due to private benefactions, and the large bequest is almost an everyday occurrence. "Sometimes, no doubt," says Professor Irvine, "it is due to the natural vanity of the self-made man, sometimes to a deathbed repentance! A good many are the direct result of the astute persuasiveness of university presidents, who keep one eye on discipline and educative policy and the other on sick or benevolently disposed millionaire!" Old graduates also give largely, and the existence of numerous university clubs in the

large cities keeps alive and strengthens their feeling for the universities. Curiously enough, the influence of these old graduates has been almost always of a conservative character. The teaching staff on some of these great institutions is very large. Outside university circles Professor Irvine found it stated frequently and emphatically that beyond a certain point size in a university was a disadvantage. It seemed to be commonly believed that the process of "going to the devil" was easier in the big universities. "A crowd of 5,000 or 6,000 students develops," says the professor, "a special psychology of its own. The slightest neglect of the want of tact makes the student public opinion the supreme power in the university; and if, as sometimes happens, it is engineered by capable but vicious leaders, the influence on the whole student body is disastrous, as regards both scholarship and character."

A Defect in the American System.

According to the system which is growing up in America, largely owing to German influence, "teaching is only one of a university's functions, and perhaps the smallest one. Its chief function is the conservation, the advancement, and discrimination of knowledge, the pushing out of that borderline between the known and the unknown which constitutes the human horizon." It is the ambition of the greater American Universities to increase the number of their graduate students. They draw a line between undergraduate and graduate. They treat the first as mainly a learner, with no time for original work or too immature for it. But when he enters the graduate school he is the master of a method, and can dig out facts for himself, and perhaps add to the sum of useful knowledge. Professor Irvine admits that this system is enabling American Universities to turn out not merely accomplished scholars, but men who have acquired the habit and power of independent investigation, especially on the scientific side. But he believes that the distinction thus drawn between the college and graduate courses is likely to kill the natural curiosity and interest of students, as well as their independence and initiative. He believes that the method of the graduate school should be applied right through the college course, and that the best university teachers in America actually do this. He also questions the advisability of prolonging university life to the extent encouraged by the American system. "Universities are not good places for a man to spend his life in. The students who hang round indefinitely may be very industrious, earnest, and receptive, but they are not usually men with origination power or the spirit of discovery and adventure."

The "Social Museum."

In America the great controversy between the classical and scientific ideals is practically over. Out of it, Professor Irvine says, has come mutual respect and a conception of learning less exclusive than is still the case at most British universities.

The curriculum covers the whole domain of human interests. New subjects that promise to be serviceable are welcomed, and none is considered unworthy. Also, the Americans have learned the use and function of libraries. They realise that these are the proper storehouses of information, and that learning is not so much the acquirement of knowledge as of mental expertness in classifying, interpreting, and reasoning from particular data. "Scholarship in America aims less at erudition than at a kind of culture calculated to give breadth of view, tolerance, and friendliness, and skill in marshalling and interpreting facts, which need not necessarily be held permanently in the memory." American universities, again, through for their degrees they insist upon a certain preliminary standard of school education, have discovered that average people are quite able to follow university courses in a variety of subjects without the systematic preparation previously thought necessary.

One of the most characteristic features of the best American universities is the importance they attach to the organization of the means of research. Not only has the inclusion of the scientific and professional departments made this necessary, but between these and the "humanities" have come a new and important set of studies—the social sciences—including sociology, economics, and political science. These also need a special equipment, of which the best and most typical instance is seen in the Social Museum of Harvard. In this institution are collected not only books and reviews dealing with social subjects, but reports of societies, and of social experiments of all kinds, newspaper cuttings on all matters of social interest, social and industrial legislation of all countries, statistics—everything that casts

a light upon the growth of industries and the movement of thought in various countries. Competent bureau assistants are supplied, so that the teachers are able to devote their time to the work of scientific generalisation, and to the student is opened a field for research into the problems of the day. Such an institution is often made a kind of public research department, in which legislators and persons interested in social reform may find information classified and up-to-date. It would not be housed in the central library of a university; indeed, the system of departmental or faculty librarians is growing in America, particularly where the university buildings are scattered.

The "Quiz and Discussion" Method.

In recent years the old lecture system has to a great extent given place, at American universities, to what has been called the "quiz and discussion" method. Each student is given sets of questions, carefully thought out, so as to enable him to take part in "a logical and coherent discussion." He is given references, and works up the answers to these questions, and on the next day classes of 25 or so meet their lecturer, and the discussion begins. The lecturer probably starts it by asking some question, and his function is to keep the thought going, to throw in critical comments, and doubts, where there is any tendency to pass over difficulties too lightly. At the end there may be a brief summing up of the conclusions reached. This system, according to Professor Irvine, may have a quite extraordinary power in stimulating interest and arousing thought. But in many cases it seemed to fail entirely. Apparently everything depends on the lecturer.

Finally comes the question whether "plutocracy exacts, in return for its munificence, any conformity of thought with the practical philosophy of the plutocrat." Professor Irvine found little evidence of any desire to shackle free discussion. Presidents and professors allowed themselves the utmost freedom in criticising trust methods and in attacking the social vices of the plutocracy. He discovered only two cases in which outspoken professors got into any trouble. One lost his billet, but was immediately snapped up by another university. The charge against the other, who had insisted upon the need of making economic researches outside the library by the study of such things as trades unions, corporation, finance, insurance, and public utilities—he was even accused of entertaining a walking delegate!—fell through. "Whatever may be the limitations which tram-mel enquiry elsewhere," said the authorities of his university, Wisconsin, "we believe that this great state university should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone truth can be found."