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UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURES.

Popular lectures are not invariably an unmixed public blessing. A generation ago the world was overrun by gentlemen who were ready to deliver themselves at short notice upon any and every subject in addresses of the type which caused the genial Artemus Ward to remark, "There's more information to be got out of a well-conducted newspaper—price of three cents—than there is out of ten popular lectures." Even at the present day it would not be difficult to name several popular lecturers who, even in recent years, have come to Australia with high-sounding reputations for eloquence and erudition, whose deliverances have conveyed scarcely the ghost of a reasonable idea in return for the time and ready cash expended by patient and long-suffering audiences. It may, therefore, be accounted somewhat risky for the Council of the University, in announcing the inauguration of a series of University extension lectures, to describe them as "popular." From the advertisements which have appeared in our columns it will have been noted that already two courses have been arranged for, and it is understood that two others are in contemplation. There can be no doubt that this new movement, if wisely conducted, may be made productive of much benefit to studiously inclined persons among the general public; but it is essential that the mistake of attempting to render the lectures attractive and nothing else should be most carefully avoided. In past years the experiment of enlisting the willing services of the University professors and lecturers for the delivery of "popular" addresses upon special subjects has been tried with comparatively indifferent success. It does not at all follow, however, that the scheme agreed upon by the University Council at its last meeting is doomed to failure. On the contrary, we believe, as we stated a couple of years ago when we first suggested the initiation of the University extension movement in South Australia, that there is ample scope for usefulness before this new educational agency.

The fatal error committed by many of the pioneers of the movement in the old country has been that of attempting to accomplish far too much with the limited time and means at their disposal. Enthusiastic young students have gone forth from Oxford, Cambridge, and other great scholastic centres as missionaries of learning and of culture to the smoke-bagrimed cities of the Midlands and the Black Country. Mental problems which have offered no difficulty to the lecturers themselves, inured as they have been to habits of close-thinking, have been set before the toil-wearied multitudes of Birmingham and Manchester, and with a confidence begotten of inexperience vast areas in the realms of knowledge have been hastily traversed without producing much practical or permanent result. The consequence has been that opportunities have been furnished for the sneers of such scoffers as Mr. Charles Whibley, who,

last August, in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century* wrote:—"What do we find for the characteristics of University extension? No continuity, but a persistently restless change of interest; no thoroughness, but a hasty contentment with the easiest smattering. It is not the University that dictates the course, but the local committee, at whose feet the University kneels with cap in hand." In other words, the people say what they want to study, and the University undertakes to provide for the satisfaction of that want. In the case of the South Australian scheme there is, we believe, an intention, should sufficient encouragement offer, to extend the lecturing system to other centres of population besides Adelaide, and, as the Professors are giving their services gratuitously, the proceeds, in the shape of

admission fees from students, will be devoted to the purpose of carrying the work further afield. It is only by accomplishing something of this kind that the movement can really justify its title of University Extension. The initial idea which prompted the pioneer lecturers in England was that of carrying the benefits of University culture to the people of other cities besides those which happened to have collegiate institutions in their midst. In the case of this colony the fact that the University is subsidized by funds from the public exchequer is certainly a strong additional reason for endeavouring to widen the range of its usefulness.

The intention of the movement is obviously in every way admirable, and the promoters are to be complimented upon the public-spirited way in which they have come forward and offered their services. The existing system of evening lectures for some of the ordinary University courses entails a certain amount of inconvenience upon the professors, but they are evidently determined to spare no pains to make the institution with which they are associated useful and popular. From the published notification of the course of lectures undertaken by Professor Mitchell it might be imagined that his efforts would be in danger of failing by reason of his attempting too much in the time allotted to him. To adequately treat the subject of "English Literature and Philosophy" in six lectures would certainly be—to use a colloquial phrase—"a very large order" indeed. From the syllabus, however, we learn that the announcement in this respect conveys an erroneous impression, as Mr. Mitchell intends to confine his survey to the writers of the years from 1700 to 1750. Even in this more circumscribed view of the task it seems plain that only a general summary of the salient features of English literature and philosophy in the "Golden Age" will be practicable. The Professor of Mathematics and Physics intends to direct his attention to the single topic of "Radiation," and will no doubt be in a position to go minutely into it. It is, we believe, in the direction of taking a limited field and traversing it thoroughly that the best chance of success will be found. Public lectures are principally of value in that they serve to whet the appetite of the hearer for information on a particular subject, and thus to induce him to learn more extensively from books at his own leisure.