

# The Advertiser

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1905.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE.

The annual report of the University Council is, as usual, rather bare and dry. Little more is ever attempted than a terse, matter-of-fact account of the year's proceedings, the hard formality of which is unrelieved by comment. Still a study of the statistical information presented enables us to measure fairly well the academical progress for the year, and to estimate the tendencies of our University system. The Adelaide University was established "to promote sound learning in the province of South Australia." How is it fulfilling its function? Satisfactorily on the whole no doubt; but there are nevertheless developments in special directions as to which approval must be qualified. A University, true to its name, covers the whole field of intellectual culture. It cannot rightly be regarded as, first of all, a technical or professional school, and only secondarily an instrument for advancing broad and liberal scholarship. The danger that besets our University is that it will assume too emphatically the former character. This does not arise from any defect in its constitution. The basis of the University, both as a teaching and as an examining body, is wide enough. It receives students and grants degrees in arts, medicine, laws, science, and music—a sufficiently comprehensive sphere of work. True, there is no place in the scheme for the study of divinity. Perhaps theology has been thus slighted for the reason given by the Methodist preacher many years ago when asked why he did not covet the distinction of D.D.—"Our divinity is not sick, and needs no doctoring." Or it may be to that exclusion of this subject was designed to agree with the policy of secular elementary education in a country possessing no State Church. In either case the omission of a theological faculty is of no material consequence. The University is broad enough without it.

Any narrowing tendencies that may be discernible merely illustrate the reaction on the University of the character of the people. Such an institution as far as possible should lead, but, within limits, it cannot fail to be impressed by the influence of its environment. The character of every institution must to some extent be determined by the *genius loci*. And so we find that the University of Adelaide markedly reflects the practical bent of the community. Mr. Gladstone once described the aim of education as that of making the human mind "a supple, strong, effective, available instrument for whatever purposes it may be applied to." In these colonies the human mind is chiefly applied to purposes connected with a liberal provision for material wants, and even the system of higher education is moulded to that end. The University of Adelaide is much more largely utilised to provide a professional equipment than to turn out ripe scholars and men of letters devoted to learning for its own sake. Its increasing popularity is distinctly associated with its specially utilitarian operations. Last year, we learn, the number of undergraduates was 93, of which 41 were studying for medical degrees, 16 were devoted to law, 13 to science, 13 to music, and 10 to arts. Of the non-graduating students 14 were preparing for certificates to enable them to practise in the Supreme Court, 63 attended various lectures of the B.A.

course, and 119 attended science lectures. Many of the students in the latter category belong to the School of Mines. At the last University Commemoration one student was admitted to the degree of M.A., three undergraduates became Bachelors of Arts, two Bachelors of Science, while five were admitted to the M.B. and Ch.B. degrees, and four to that of LL.B. If the statistics for the past four years are consulted, it will be found that in that period four M.A. degrees have been conferred, 11 B.A. (including three ladies), 16 B.Sc. (including three ladies), one M.D., 18 M.B. and Ch.B. (including one lady), and 15 LL.B. Accordingly we see that more than half of the distinctions obtained are of the kind which qualify for a professional career. The Arts course suffers even in comparison with that of science. Undoubtedly, as between a classical and a scientific education, the bent of the modern mind is more favorable to the latter. But even here the deciding factor may not be exclusively an intellectual preference or bias, since science is now largely cultivated for its material rewards.

The relative neglect by University students of the *libera humaniores* will appear to many besides academicians of the old type as a circumstance to be deplored. We do not want our University to become, even chiefly, a sort of factory for the production of doctors and lawyers. It has still a higher service to perform as a school of the widest culture, and we should be better pleased if a larger number from all classes of the community sought its honors from a perfectly disinterested devotion to "sound learning." The University training for professional life is doubtless of great value, and we have reason to feel proud that such excellent appliances are at hand for rendering it effective. It is to be regretted, however, that the scholastic side of the University should be so heavily overshadowed by the civil. There is another aspect of this question that deserves attention. What are we going to do with all the lawyers and doctors which the colonial Universities are yearly turning out? The difficulty of providing for the former class may not be specially serious. The honorable profession of the law has never been at a loss to devise means for protection against the overcrowding of its ranks. But the threatened oversupply of medical practitioners is a matter of considerable concern to a learned profession not nearly so well guarded. No statute or rule of Court protects the duly-qualified doctor against the frequently successful rivalry of quacks. To add to this the competition which will spring from an excessive supply of regular practitioners is to create a prospect by no means pleasing to those particularly concerned. Of late years the proportion of doctors to population has been rapidly advancing in English-speaking countries. There is practically no opening in Great Britain for men holding Australian degrees, and if the local market cannot absorb them all, how are they to live? A little consideration should restrain the eagerness now apparent to launch young men into a profession which may speedily be overstocked.