THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XI. UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, FEBRUARY 9, 1892. No. 15.

Editorial Comments.

THE present age is characterized by an intellectual unrest—a striving after broadened mental culture, and our universities are endeavoring to satisfy this want. The general method adopted is to largely increase the amount of work which has to be done by the student. In order to appreciate the effect of this increase we shall consider the work laid down in the curriculum of Toronto University.

Any one who compares the present curriculum of the University with that which was in use between '85-'90 must at once be struck with the far greater amount of work which has to be done under the regulations of the present curriculum. The pass work prescribed in French and German, for Honor students, has been largely increased. The policy which has actuated the authorities in this respect is a little hard to understand. Is the object to give the student a comprehensive knowledge of all French or German literature? Then why not a still more comprehensive course—under these new circumstances we would, probably, get over about as much of the texts in the lectures as we do at present. Or is the idea to give the student an appreciation of the genius of the language, which will induce him to continue making a study of it in after life? If such is the intention, then how can this be more effectually brought about than by a thorough study of, say, one important text? As it is at present, there is either too much or too little pass work. One is tempted to believe that in a contest for pre-eminence between two rivals the poor student has come between the upper and the nether mill-stone.

But this is only a minor part of the question; there is another and more important defect in the curriculum as it at present exists—it really defeats its ostensible aim. If the curriculum means anything it means that from the study of the work laid down the student can obtain a development which will be conducive to his success in after life. However, the exceedingly large amount of work which is laid down, in all the branches, militates against a thorough knowledge, even in the special branch, and almost precludes any acquaintances with the still wider field of knowledge which exists beyond. As the work prescribed in each department stands at present it is well-nigh impossible for an ordinary mortal to have a thorough knowledge of all the work laid down, and consequently, in too many cases, knowing that he cannot get all his work up thoroughly he loses sight of the general intellectual culture, and works merely to get through the examination. Now even if we must have specialization, might it not be possible to have it without having connected with it the superficiality which, in too many instances, characterizes it at present? Would one be less thoroughly educated if instead of running rapidly through a dozen books he read four books thoroughly, assimilating their contents to his intellectual being and then *thought*?

As we have mentioned above, the specializing tendency of the curriculum almost altogether precludes a general knowledge. Go to any student, who is taking up an Honor Course, and question him concerning work which does not fall within his immediate province, and you will find—unless he has had great opportunities in the way of general reading in earlier life—that, in too many instances, he is lamentably ignorant of anything outside of his particular course. Is this right? Can we obtain a real education when any such state of affairs is prevalent? In the world around us are rising every day poets and writers, new intellectual and moral forces are manifesting themselves, but bound up by the trammels of our Classical Course or our Science Course we have no time to devote to the acquisition of general knowledge, and while the world moves on we lag behind. Four of the *making* years of our life are spent in obtaining a minute and technical knowledge of some specialty, and then we have to endeavor to get out of the rut and obtain real knowledge. We do not desire to depreciate the importance of Classics or of Science or of any of the other Honor Courses, but it must be remembered that they are after all only one phase of mental development; if we devote all our time and attention to the development of merely one side of our intellectual nature, the development will be as symmetrical as in the case of an athlete who should devote all care and energy to the development of one arm alone.

But after all, important as book knowledge is, is it all of university life? It has been said that one can read books at home, but that the real advantage of coming to a university is the coming in contact with new minds, new faces, new ideas; and in this position there is much truth. The part of university education which will be of most benefit to us in after life will not be what we obtained from books alone but the knowledge of human nature which we have gained. The practised student of human nature is far better fitted for being a success in life than the practised book-worm. We cannot, however, devote attention to this phase of education as things are at present; the work to be done is so excessive, that, when we would mingle with the student body, the remembrance of the pile of work to be done holds one as the ancient mariner held the wedding guest. And the consequence of such a state of affairs is, that the students, instead of devoting attention to the phases of human nature all around them, instead of attending the various societies, where a practical knowledge may be obtained which will be of great benefit in after life, spend their time in burning the midnight oil and ruining their constitutions with excessive work. A recent graduate said that over one-half of the graduates of Toronto University go out with constitutions shattered by excessive