

Special Articles.

COLLEGE CONFEDERATION.

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The advantage which it is hoped will accrue from confederation seems to consist in a nearer approach to uniformity in the value of degrees, and the establishment of a University more complete in its functions and equipment than any that we now possess. At last an attempt has been made to reduce vague and floating aspirations to tangible form, and the result is to be seen in the scheme recently submitted by the Minister of Education to the heads of the various institutions of learning in Ontario. A proposal which has met with the general approval of those intended to be affected by it, cannot but possess meritorious features, and in any criticism made upon those parts of it which do not commend themselves so highly, it must be remembered that imperfections are to be expected in any solution of a problem so difficult. Doubtless, the excellencies of the scheme will be fully dealt with by other gentlemen. It will suffice, therefore, if the writer suggests some of the drawbacks which present themselves to one who regards the question as a graduate of Queen's, and a citizen of Kingston.

In the first place we find that "it is proposed to form a Confederation of colleges, carrying on in *Toronto* work embraced in the arts curriculum, etc." The rest of the Province is to be stripped of centres of learning in order that these may be drawn together in a focus in one city. Can such a movement result in public advantage? Is it approved by the experience of the world, and the conviction of modern authorities on educational matters? The range of examples which might be drawn upon for argument and illustration is very wide; let us content ourselves with a glance at the course of events in the Mother Country, which we believe to be in the van of civilization. For five hundred years the youth of England desirous of a training in liberal arts were compelled to resort to Oxford and Cambridge. But, within the present century, and almost entirely within the past twenty years, a change has come o'er the spirit of the dream. The men whose opinions have most powerfully influenced thought, whose depth of information and insight into the problems of the age are unsurpassed, have not lent their abilities to the confinement of higher education to its ancient abodes by the Isis and the Cam. On the contrary, England with the fruits of the long and splendid career of her famous universities before her, has decided that such institutions should be multiplied, and new foundations erected in different quarters of the Kingdom. Within the present century the universities of Durham, London and Manchester have been established, while new colleges have been built, and are being liberally endowed in almost every considerable city in England and Wales.

Coincident with the multiplication of Universities and Colleges, there has been witnessed another extraordinary spectacle illustrating the trend of circumstances in England. This is the University extension scheme, by which academic faculties consisting of fellows and lecturers have been sent to teach and lecture in a great number of commercial towns.

The key to the progress of higher education in England of late years is therefore to be found in decentralisation, and increased attention to the wants of localities. Are we so far raised above the conditions found essential to success elsewhere, that we can disregard the current of events and the teachings of experience?

Shall our advance be backward? If all the Colleges in Ontario were bunched in *Toronto* to-morrow, we should hear very shortly an outcry for University extension. Why then are we to be at the trouble of destroying our present system in order to commence again, and do for the Province what Queen's is helping to do in a superior fashion now? There is always much loss in change, there are evils involved in breaking the continuity of history and association. We require clear and weighty benefits to compensate for drawbacks so serious.

Many will ask what good can flow from the localisation of University advantages? The difference between attending classes in Kingston and attending in *Toronto*, is apt to appear too insignificant to be worth note. Yet a little reflection will show that we have here an important factor in the consideration of our problem. In Queen's University there are at present two hundred and forty students attending classes in arts. Of this number over two hundred come from Eastern Ontario. It may be difficult to analyze the motives which draw men towards the college in their own neighbourhood; to say whether the additional distance interposed between them and institutions farther away arises in the mind as an obstacle, whether people are brought into greater familiarity with that which is nearer through the local press and the intercourse of trade, or whether there is a minor sentiment of patriotism involved. There stands the fact, however, showing that there is a force of gravitation at work in these matters, which appears to vary in strength inversely as the square of the distance. The result of destroying the operation of this force by removing its active agent in Kingston is obvious. Some of the students who now come to Queen's would go to McGill, a large number would remain at home, and those who would repair to *Toronto* are merely a residuum. There would thus be a positive loss to education, as a considerable portion of the population would be withdrawn from the fertilizing influence of culture.

From another point of view the new scheme presents an equally unfavourable aspect. It is proposed to have but one type of University in Ontario. If this type were the best, other objections would be minimised. But our single University is to be under State control, instead of being left to the free play of its own activities. Absolute independence is the historical characteristic of Universities, and would seem to be the first requisite of success. Harvard was a State institution from its foundation in 1637 down to 1866, but the ceaseless strife and controversy incident to such a relationship so greatly retarded the progress and development of the University, that in the latter year it was released. Then Harvard gained not only freedom from embarrassing interference, but a flow of private munificence greater in proportion than during any former period of its history. Witness as another illustration of how State control checks that generosity which droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven, the contrast between the dearth of benefactions to *Toronto* University and the response made again and again to the call of Queen's.

Connected with the centralization phase of the question is a minor point not unworthy of notice. Many parents would object and with sufficient reason, to send their sons and daughters to study in a city so full of distractions and temptations as *Toronto*.

Our remarks have drawn out to such a length that further observations must be postponed.

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