

CONTRIBUTED.

University Consolidation.

TO those who take an active part in advancing the cause of higher education in Ontario, it is always a pleasure to know that the public in general and the press in particular evince a keen anxiety for the future of our universities. It is quite true, as the press occasionally points out, that the universities of Ontario are not so thoroughly equipped in all their departments as their best friends would wish them to be. But this is no fault of the universities, but is rather to be attributed to the unavoidable condition of the country. Hitherto the people of Ontario, like all young colonists, have been almost solely occupied in developing the material resources of the country, thus leaving very little time and means for the cultivation of the intellect. But we have reason to believe that notwithstanding the enormous difficulties that have been in the way of imparting higher education, the principal universities of this young colony have been keenly alive to the necessity of keeping pace with the material and intellectual progress of the country.

It is only a question of time and means for our colleges to be as amply and suitably equipped as the more noted of European institutions. Considering the condition of our universities it is but reasonable that we should hear premature suggestions made with a view to consolidate into one grand whole the scattered powers that exist in Ontario for imparting higher education. This scheme is represented by a high sounding title, "University Consolidation." No one, however, has ventured on laying before the public the plan on which the different universities are to become one. If "University Consolidation" has in itself the remedy for curing the defects that are from time to time pointed out why should not those interested in the matter form an intelligible scheme, from which the public will learn its merits and how it is likely to operate? Hitherto we have only been treated to semi-dissatisfied literary articles on higher education, concluding with an appeal for University Consolidation without giving the least information as to what it means. So far however as we have been able to gather from different sources this scheme has for its object the convergence of the different universities of Ontario into one whole. In other words there shall be only one institution having the power to grant "degrees" in Arts; and the universities at present entrusted with these powers are merely to serve in the capacity of teaching bodies?

No doubt this scheme at first sight appeals to the sympathy of the educational economist, but when we commence to examine it we find that it is too sweeping and revolutionary to become popular as well as too superficial for a panacea for the ills complained of. Two reasons are generally assigned why this measure should become law. The first is that a great saving of time and money would be realized in having one such institution instead of many. Secondly, that we should have more uniformity in the standard value of diplomas than we now have by the fact of four or five institutions being entrusted with the distribution of these honours. We fail to see how any saving can be realized by having one institution instead of many having the power of granting degrees! Surely it is unnecessary for us to point out that the mere conferring of degrees does not cost the faculty that confers them one cent, except perhaps the trifle that is spent on the parchment on which the diploma is written. It was silly and weak of the *Mail* newspaper in an article the other day to advocate University Consolidation on the plea of economy. It was still more absurd and unnecessary to warn our universities against the system prevalent in some institutions in the United States where the degree conferring power is said to be used as "a lure,"

"bait," and further as a means of filling a depleted treasury.

In reply to this insinuation one may say that Queen's, Victoria, and even Toronto University have been and now are religiously scrupulous in using the powers that are theirs as universities, and any one speaking in terms different utter the most arrant nonsense.

The truth is that not a cent would be saved should consolidation take place to-morrow. The only rational way by which a saving can take place is to consolidate both the universities and the teaching powers that are attached to them into one. If this can by any means take place a saving in expenditure will be the necessary result; for instead of having scores of professors scattered throughout the country their number will be limited to meet the requirements of one college only. Consolidation in this form has some meaning; but after all how are the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing this scheme to be removed?

Let us suppose by way of illustration that the authorities of Queen's decide to give up the powers, property and emoluments that are attached to it as a University and teaching body and place them in the hands of the Government for the purpose of forming this "National University" that is spoken of.

In the event of their doing so they would be guilty of transcending the powers that are theirs as trustees of the property entrusted to their charge. As trustees they are as much responsible for the proper administration of the affairs of the College as the executors of a private estate, to whom is entrusted the duty of carrying out the last will and testament of a dying individual. Queen's was established by the voluntary bequests and contributions of those who when they gave their money understood that it was to be applied *in perpetuo* to the object for which they bequeathed it. If this is a correct view of the matter how can the trustees of Queen's surrender the rights of the College without rendering themselves amenable to the civil law for daring to tamper with the sacredness of wills and bequests. It may perhaps be said with a good show of reason that an Act of Parliament can be passed in order to legalize such a transfer. Yes; we admit an Act of Parliament can do anything so long as it is not against the moral and constitutional tone of the country. The Government no doubt might arrogate to itself the right of compelling the universities of Ontario to surrender their rights, titles and property. But what Government can we imagine so rash and revolutionary as to venture on such arbitrary and destructive legislation. In the event of its doing so what is to become of that conception which is at the very foundation of the law of jurisprudence—the inviolability and sacredness of property and bequests. If Parliament may with impunity confiscate the property of an institution or corporation, what is to prevent it from confiscating that of a private individual? These are some of the obstacles that stand in the way of University Confederation of this kind, and whatever form it may assume, cannot be such as will destroy the autonomy of the present institutions. No doubt such a scheme is the most congenial to the friends of University College. They find now at all events that it is an exceedingly difficult matter to support with state aid an institution that is destined to be left behind by others that are utterly independent of any such support. Consequently any scheme that should have a tendency to aggrandize the so-called National University is readily laid hold of and advocated on the fallacious plea that the interests of higher education demands its becoming law. There must be something radically wrong in the internal economy of University College.

No institution in this country has received as much bolstering and nursing; and yet she seems at present as