THE VARSITY.

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In our issue of the 29th of January, we referred to some needed changes in the curriculum of the University of Toronto. The principal change proposed was that the High Schools and Collegiate Institutes of the Province should relieve the University of the greater part of the work now done in the first year. Such a course would enable the University to undertake post-graduate work and to give more time—now devoted to elementary studies—to advanced courses. That such is the manifest duty of a University, and above all of a Provincial, or National Institution, is a fact about which there can be little diversity of opinion. James Russell Lowell's idea of a University is an exceedlngiy broad one: he defines a University as "a place where nothing useful is taught; but a University is only possible where a man may get his livelihood by digging Sanscrit roots." What this means in plain English is: that a University should be in a position to undertake educational work of all kinds, especially advanced studies; and that it should not only be in a position to furnish students with all kinds of mental food, but that it should provide opportunities for the prosecution of investigations into every branch of human knowledge; and that, as Mr. Lowell says, "a man may get his livelihood by digging Sanscrit roots." A University, in Mr. Lowell's sense of the term, is not limited to a teaching Faculty, or an examining Board merely, but will afford scholars and teachers with ample means and opportunities for research and independent study in special subjects. If such be a true ideal of a University, it may seem to be somewhat out of our reach at present. But we are convinced that such is a true conception of the function of a University worthy of the name. Some conditions are necessary for even an approximation to such an ideal. A few of the essential requisites, leaving out the financial side of the question, are: That the educational system of the country be framed upon a homogeneous plan; that each part of the educational system be made to fill its own special place, and lead up naturally and gradually to the next higher stage; and that a high standard of excellence be maintained throughout. These conditions may appear to be self-evident; but they are none the less essential to the vitality of any educational system, and to the successful development of that natural outcome of such systems—a University.

What we have been saying will be seen to have a practical bearing when we consider, somewhat in detail, our own Uuiversity in its relation to the educational system of Ontario. We have said that a university should provide both the time, means and opportunity for the prosecution of advanced literary or scientific work of any and every kind. We are afraid that we must confess that our present system fails in this respect. It is almost impossible for professors and teachers, on the dreary treadmill of instruction week in and week out, to contribute much of permanent value to the accumulated store of general knowledge, or to develope themselves in their own chosen field of investigation. It may be said in reply that it would be impossible, if not unwise, to seek to transplant an Oxford or a Cambridge system to this continent. It certainly would be impossible to inaugurate at once, and upon a similar scale, a system as vast as that of the universities of the Old Land; it would be unwise to do so all at once, or to impose all the prejudices and peculiarities of Oxford and Cambridge upon our American college system; it would assuredly be a scheme worthy of a *nouveau riche* to attempt to erect at once an Oxford or a Cambridge upon the foundations of our own University. For it must be remembered that these old institutions, which we so much admire and esteem, are the result of time; that their systems carry with them all the accretions which hoary age has gathered around them; and that such a result cannot be forced, but must be a natural growth, aided and encouraged by the national life and spirit. But we must also remember that we, of the present, are building for the future; that we must lay the foundations broad and deep, that those who come after us may fashion into grace and beauty and utility what we have only in the rough, and that posterity will hold us to account if we do not make ample provision for the demands of the future.

We must here leave our duty to posterity, and seek to discover what that duty is which lies nearest to our hands at the present. And this will be found, we think, to suggest itself in the answers to the questions: Are we making any progress? And, if not, what is the reason? Progress of a certain kind we are making, or our sphere of action and usefulness would have been filled by others ere this. But the most important kind of progress—that of approximating to the Sanscrit root ideal—we have not made to any appreciable extent. And the reasons for this are revealed by a study of the curriculum. The amount of purely elementary work—the prosecution of which is not, strictly speaking, university work—which the present condition of the secondary schools practically imposes upon the staff of University College, plainly shows that no progress is being made, if there is not positive retrogression in the condition of these schools. The cause of this stagnancy is either in the secondary or in the public schools; for the one is dependent on the other, and the university on both. If the standard of the public schools is lowered, and the extent of its curriculum restricted, work which it might and could do must then be taken up by the high schools and collegiate institutes; these, in turn, must lower their standard, and restrict the scope of their course of study; and, finally, the university is compelled to lower its standard and curtail its curriculum, and take up, in the first year at least, a very great deal of the work which, if the public and high schools did their duty, it would not have to undertake. It will be thus seen how dependent every part of our educational system is upon all the others; and it will thus be evident that if a high standard is to be maintained in a university, and opportunities given for development of every kind, it is imperative that those schools upon which the university is most dependent should be made more efficient, and should be as advanced as it is possible to make them.

Now, if we look at the courses of study in the public and high schools and in the collegiate institutes, and if we compare them with those in force a few years ago, we shall discover what may perhaps account, in some degree, for the present stationary condition of our educational system. In 1876 and thereabouts, the public schools of the Province had, by law, six classes. The programme was arranged in a gradually ascending scale, and the sixth class took up reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, analysis, parsing, composition, geography, history, elements of civil government, nature and use of mechanical powers, Euclid, books I. and II., mensuration of solids and squares, book-keeping and elementary agriculture. This may have been an ambitious programme, but it was one eminently calculated to furnish those who attended the public schools with "the first essentials of education for every youth," and were such as "should be embraced in a public school curriculum, and which have been, and can be, easily learned by pupils under 12 years of age." Let us now glance at our public school programme for 1886—ten years later. We find only four classes. The fourth class has it Fourth Reader, spelling and pronunciation are taught, business forms and accounts are familiarized, drawing, singing and drill are taken up, the elements of formal grammar, composition and history are taught, the mathematics include vulgar and decimal fractions, percentage and interest, and mental arithmetic. Giving this programme the most liberal interpretation, and the advantages which improved methods insure, we must confess that it falls behind the old standard of the sixth and even the fifth class. Provision is made for a fifth class, whose programme is certainly up to the old model, but the School Regulations (edition of 1885, page 101) distinctly say: "Trustees are recommended not to form a fifth class in the public school in any