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ON
THE DUTIES OF
AN UNIVERSITY
TOWARDS THE NATION

By A. C. SWINBURNE

With an Introduction by

WILLIAM P. TOLLEY

THE COURIER

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THE COURIER



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AN UNIVERSITY
TOWARDS THE NATION

By A. C. SWINBURNE

With an Introduction by

WILLIAM P. TOLLEY

NOTE

As an undergraduate at Oxford University from the beginning of 1856 to the end of 1859, Algernon Charles Swinburne—later to become one of the great figures of English Literature—wrote numerous papers and essays to fulfill portions of the curriculum laid down by his tutors. The original manuscripts of some of these unpublished compositions have miraculously survived, and a few have been issued by their owners in small privately printed editions, copies of which are eagerly sought by bibliophiles and collectors of such unusual items.

On the Duties of an University towards the Nation, which appears here for the first time in print, was written in black ink on four demy quarto leaves, recto and verso, making eight pages of text, on unlined, cream-colored, watermarked, laid paper, with three edges marbled. The undated watermark shows a seated Britannia surrounded by an oval surmounted by a crown. The left edges of the leaves are ragged and uneven, evidence that the manuscript was torn from an exercise book of the type Swinburne is known to have used as a student. The date of composition cannot be determined definitely, but a calculated conjecture would place the time as during the early months of 1858.

The original manuscript of this early essay by the youthful Swinburne is in The Mayfield Library at Syracuse University.

INTRODUCTION

Exceptional talents are evident almost from birth. We should, therefore, not be too surprised when undergraduate essays are of high quality. It is, however, a rare student essay that a century later is as timely as the day it was written.

In the delightful essay now appearing in print for the first time we have what is particularly appropriate for publication in 1969. This was the year of student rebellion and disruption. It was also a time when the mass media had much to say on the theme of university governance. In such a year Swinburne's words have special relevance and we are deeply grateful to John S. Mayfield for sharing them with us in this special edition.

The responsibility of the university to the nation is the same despite the passage of time. The pace of change, the pressure to reapportion power, the demands for the restructuring of university governance, do not alter the idea of the university or the nature of its obligation to the nation.

In response to the student voices finding all manner of fault with our universities, Swinburne replies, "This very passion of opposition, this earnestness in denouncing what evil seems to you to have overgrown an institution, evidently enough proves that you look upon the original idea whence it grew as one true and worthy. Else, why this anger at its supposed falling off? And admitting this to be so, is not all wholesale denunciation irrational and hopeless to bring forth a remedy?"

"The truth seems to be, that such assailants do not really know what they want. And those who confound good and evil in one attack, while they can do no material injury to the good, are pretty sure to fortify and increase the evil."

Swinburne may have been too generous in his judgment that critics of the university "can do no material injury to the good," although fortifying and increasing evil. In Japan, Italy, France, as well as South America, we have learned how vulnerable educational institutions are. In many parts of the world higher education as we have known it has been substantially destroyed.

We applaud, however, the distinction between instruction and education, and with this the understanding that the great business of education is "to nerve and strengthen the mind—to develop the intellectual faculty—by giving fair play to every capacity for good; to train equally all talents to do the highest work they may; to keep the heart on a level with the mind, by denying neither the exertion and the repose which each in turn requires."

In a sensate culture where we are too often ruled by appetite and desire, Swinburne has made clear the idea of the university. In doing so he gives us hope that what is timeless will always be timely.

WILLIAM P. TOLLEY,

Chancellor Emeritus,

Syracuse University.

ON THE DUTIES OF AN UNIVERSITY TOWARDS THE NATION

By A. C. SWINBURNE

EDUCATION and the theories which guide it are among the most unstable of a people's possessions; it is well and necessary that they should be so. For the requirements of every age must have other sustenance than satisfied its predecessor. Time and change having done their work upon the inner life of a nation, how should they spare the outward institutions? These were only valuable as the exponents of the principle within. When they cease to fulfil this office, they are worse than useless; they encumber the path toward better things, they infect the air which without them were wholesome to breathe. It is simply impossible that what sufficed one generation should suffice all that succeed it.

Such arguments as the above are not unfrequently brought to bear, with more or less injustice, upon the open questions regarding our Universities in their relation to national life and well-being. Opponents charge them with forsaking the purposes for which they were originally intended—with living a life of convention apart from the time and its changes—in short, with any shortcoming they imagine to be discernible, so they can but suit their purpose and make a show of carrying their point. To all unreasoning animosity it is easy to answer: 'This very passion of opposition, this earnestness in denouncing what evil seems to you to have overgrown an institution, evidently enough proves that you look upon the original idea whence it grew as one true and worthy. Else, why this anger at its supposed falling off? And admitting this to be so, is not all wholesale denunciation irrational and hopeless to bring forth a remedy?'

On the duties of an University towards the Nation.

Education & the theories which guide it are among the most valuable of a people's possessions. It is well & necessary that they should be so for the requirements of every age ^{must have} ~~are changed~~ other necessities than ~~from those which~~ satisfied its predecessor. Time & change having done their work upon the inner life of a nation, how should they spare the outward institutions? These were only valuable as the exponents of the principle within. When they cease to fulfil this office, they are worse than useless; they encumber the path to new & better things, they infect the air which without them men were inhaling to breathe. It is simply impossible that what sufficed one generation should suffice all that succeed it.

Reduced Reproduction of the First Page of the Original
Manuscript of Swinburne's Essay.

Notice the rust marks left by old paper clips.

The truth seems to be, that such assailants do not really know what they want. And those who confound good and evil in one attack, while they can do no material injury to the good, are pretty sure to fortify and increase the evil. Moreover, these very men who are so loud in outcries against errors of education, themselves often fall into the popular mistake of confounding instruction with education. They are wholly different, and their relative spheres of action lie far apart. He who should sum up his ideas of education in the word instruction—and there are those who, if not in words, at least in their practice maintain and vindicate this dogma—would as wisely expect to climb a ladder by standing still on the lowest step. Instruction is the narrowest and meanest branch of education. Indispensable of course in its place—but a dangerous thing when it supersedes higher instruments of mental discipline. It is not to cram the intellect with miscellaneous information enough to enable a man to say something on every question that may be brought before him—to stifle the reluctant mind under a weight of facts or blind it in a mist of theories—that lies the aim of education. Its business, now and ever, is to nerve and strengthen the mind—to develop the intellectual faculty—by giving fair play to every capacity for good; to train equally all talents to do the highest work they may; to keep the heart on a level with the mind, by denying neither the exertion and the repose which each in turn requires.

As far as any system can do this for one among all those brought up according to its regulations, so far is it fit to have the care of his training and far will it succeed in the aim assigned to it. So far as it falls short of this end, so far is its success imperfect. To expect entire success in every case, perhaps in the majority of cases, would be to expect Utopia. Still, the test is not unfair or impracticable. And applied to the question now considered, it might not be difficult to show in what points the existing system fulfils these requisites, and how alterations of the nature before alluded to would be certain to impair that good.

First, instead of universal sciolism, their standard is limited knowledge. The former invariably entails intellectual weakness and near-sighted self-conceit. The latter as certainly produces a vigour and accuracy of intellect which no other system of instruction can give. Secondly, the very idea which originally founded these institutions is that of intellectual equality—an even chance to all, and a fair field for the discovery and display of the highest talent. Both these advantages would be done away with by restriction or by lowering of the intellectual standard. Either by seclusion from the rest of the world and callousness to the requirements of its time, or by the introduction of a lower tone and

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which shall be more than instruction, & shall of its
own strength be adequate to meet the wants of a
changing time; for no otherwise will a system stand
or fall.

"to meet the wants of a changing time"
Last page of Swinburne's Essay.

adoption of the formula of instruction so as to exclude the wider idea of education, would the university fail of its duty to the nation. A nation is justified in expecting from such institutions wisdom to perceive and activity to follow out its line of duty; in looking for equal justice to all and development of the best by the best means; in short, for an education which shall be more than instruction, and shall of its own strength be adequate to meet the wants of a changing time; for no otherwise will a system stand or fall.

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