

## Universities of the Empire.

With the selection of a very distinguished band of chairmen, whose names are announced this morning, another definite stage is reached in the long and elaborate preparations for the Congress of Universities of the Empire. The Congress is to meet in London for four days' formal discussion in July, and to remain in being as a party of fellow-travellers for nearly another month. Its members will be drawn from every quarter of the British Empire where Universities exist. They will be delegates carefully chosen by their respective Senates as best qualified to discuss the common and special problems of British Universities, no fewer than fifty-two of which will be represented altogether. Not only in completeness, but in the difference which distinguishes a body of picked representatives from a haphazard collection of University men, the Congress bids fair to mark a great stride forward from any previous gathering of the kind. The organizers are building on the foundations laid down by their predecessors. With the experience and time at their disposal they have been able to avoid many blunders and risks of wasting time. The subjects for debate have been chosen as carefully as the men who are to debate them, and they are wisely limited, not only to the special function of Universities in education, but to those problems of University work which are actually ripe for practical solution. According to the programme which we published last November in the *Educational Supplement of The Times*, they fall into two main divisions—the first consisting of questions affecting the relations of British Universities to one another, the second embracing the relations of Universities towards their teachers and students and the nation at large. Under one or other of these headings are ranged a series of topics for discussion calculated to fill the whole of the allotted four days. They have all been communicated to the various Universities, which are engaged already in getting together the necessary information and in allotting the business of the Congress to the delegates best qualified to deal with its different aspects. The appointment of the chairmen, in fact, is the last of a series of careful arrangements, extending now over many months, and designed to ensure that the Congress shall arrive at practical results.

It is, we think, of real importance that the practical possibilities of a Congress of the kind should be thoroughly weighed and understood beforehand by every one concerned in it. No doubt the mere fact of its meeting at all will in itself be an advantage of a very practical kind, since it is bound in any case to lead to the interchange and broadening of ideas, and to that personal acquaintance which is the first step to common action. But, as we show in greater detail in another column, there are certain obvious directions in which a Congress of Universities, held at this particular stage, has the opportunity of making definite progress in mutual assistance. There is the growing movement, first and foremost, in favour of an easier interchange of teachers and students. No one questions the enormous value of a system under which, for example, Canadian schoolboys could be readily admitted to the schools of History at Oxford or Medicine at Edinburgh, while young Englishmen in their turn were enabled to study agriculture at Guelph, without dislocating the continuity of their education. Enough has been

one already by individuals to show the real demand for a "freer trade in students"; but the conditions of entrance to the various Universities of the Empire are still far too various and confused to admit of migration in any but exceptional cases. If the Congress does nothing else, it can achieve a work of the highest Imperial value by devising a common bridge from the schools to the Universities of the Empire. The case for a constant interchange of teachers is equally insistent if their work is to be fresh and informed. Here, again, something has been done already by individual enterprise, and it is reasonable to hope that the Congress will suggest opportunities of doing more. There are certain courses of study, in particular, for which the smaller Universities have only an occasional demand. A little co-operation in the arrangement of their time-tables would often enable the same Professor to serve a number of them, so that they would actually secure better lectures at smaller cost. It need hardly be added that every project of the kind will be immensely simplified if the Congress determines to perpetuate its existence by the creation of a Central University Bureau with a permanent "Secretariat."

The hope of definite results is all the brighter because the Universities are coming together at an auspicious moment in their own development and in that of the Empire which they serve. The last few years have been a period of immense activity in the creation of Universities of the modern type, and they have seen unprecedented changes in the ancient foundations. Both alike have been called upon to meet new demands and wider responsibilities. The conception of the University as the training-ground of a small governing class has been immeasurably expanded. It is recognized everywhere that for the future no class and no occu-

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pation is quite outside their influence; they touch the whole range of national life at every point. How far it is the business of any of them to provide a special training for technical occupations, whether it is good that they should all cater for every sort of student, or whether they can agree to develop in such a way as to avoid purely wasteful competition—these are some of the questions which the Congress will have to face when it meets. It is clear enough, at any rate, that the time has just arrived when it is possible to take stock of momentous developments in the education system of every country in the Empire and to consider them together. It is a time, too, when other changes, in which the Universities are deeply concerned, are looming ahead. The great self-governing Dominions are beginning to claim a larger share in the direction of Imperial affairs. Every one is agreed that it is their right, as time goes on, to be united more and more closely with the Mother Country in the public services, the control of defence and diplomacy, the administration of the great dependencies of the Crown. No real organization of the kind is possible to-day, for the simple reason that there is no standard of training which is common to the Empire as a whole. If the Universities, whose special interest it is, can do something to supply such a standard, they will not only strengthen their own position, but also render invaluable service to the cause of Imperial union.