

DEMOCRATISING THE UNIVERSITY.

Points by a Professor,

[By Professor Jethro Brown.]

So much has been said about making our University a more democratic institution that I have thought that you might be not unwilling to find space in your columns for a few suggestions on the subject, by one who has studied the organization of universities in many countries, and has been for many years deeply interested in the progress of the democratic movement. The classic definition of democracy—government of the people, by the people, and for the people—defines the ideal organization of the State. The University is an institution within the State; and only one of the three elements included in the foregoing definition is appropriate in a literal sense. The individuals who are in any sense subject to the government of the University are not "the people," but a section of the people—a section composed of a teaching staff, graduates, and students. Further, the functions which the University has to discharge are such as to make government "by the people" impracticable. Theoretically, of course, the electors of Parliament might also be the electors of the governing body of the University; but no one who is intimately acquainted with the problems of university administration could support the proposal. These problems are of a kind with which the average elector is ill-qualified to deal; but, even if he were qualified, he is not sufficiently interested in them. For practical purposes, then, the reformer who advocates the democratisation of the University may be assumed to have in view the government of the University "for the people." A university may be justly said to be a democratic institution when it is a national institution—not in the sense that it embraces every citizen, nor even in the sense that every elector has a direct voice in its management, but in the sense that it is responsive to national needs, and fulfils national purposes. To my thinking, the foregoing conclusion implies that the University shall be properly organized, easily accessible, and adequately equipped. I propose to say a word on each of these subjects.

—I. The Organization of the University.—

The university should be so organized that its governing body shall be both efficient and representative of public opinion. Now, these objects are not easily combined. It is not difficult to create an efficient bureaucracy; nor, on the other hand, is it difficult to create a body which is democratic in spirit and yet incompetent to give intelligent expression to that spirit. I believe, however, that the aims referred to could be combined without any revolutionary reorganization of the present system. I give it as my own opinion that the Senate of the University should retain its present function of electing representatives on the Council. From the standpoint of efficiency, the Senate is a good electoral body. Its members are experts. They are themselves graduates of the University, who know from experience the kind of problems which arise in university administration; and they are able to judge who are most likely to prove efficient members of the Council, or governing body. (2) Since the members of the Senate are also members of the University, on the democratic principle of self-government they have a special claim to share in its administration. Self-government in the University, no less than in the State, is a good thing—it gives vitality to the institution and a sense of responsibility to its members. (3) The test of an institution is, "How does it work?" not how does it fit in with some preconceived theory. Now, the Senate of the University has elected in the past a governing body which has proved efficient. The members of that governing body have worked with a single view to promoting the usefulness of the University. They have had no axe to grind. That they have been infallible in all their judgments and actions could not be claimed; but no one can challenge their desire to make the University an efficient institution, or their general competence to give effect to that desire. That an institution has worked well in practice does not show that it is beyond improvement. While I believe that the Senate should continue to elect representatives to the Council, I believe that the Deans of the several Faculties should be ex officio members of the Council, and that the Parliament of the State should also elect representatives on the Council. Each of these changes deserves a word of comment. The Dean of a Faculty is charged with the duty of looking

after the interests of all the students in the Faculty. He is, therefore, in close touch with those students, acquainted with their needs, and specially qualified to assist in the deliberations of the governing body. His duties as Dean involve an intimate acquaintance with the practical administration of the business of the University in his own particular department. Whenever any matter affecting that department is under the consideration of the Council, he should be present to inform the Council, alike in the interests of the students, the Faculty, and the University. The view that the Parliament of the State should be directly represented on the Council is held by the Council itself, and supported by the recommendations of the present Royal Commission on Education. The main purpose of such representation would be to guarantee a responsiveness to public opinion. The representation would also serve the purpose of increasing the public confidence in the University. The number of Parliamentary representatives need not be large. In my opinion, four would be adequate, since their power would be far in excess of their numerical strength on the Council. As they would speak for the Parliament of the State, they would control the pursestrings. Little of importance could be done without their co-operation.

—II. The Accessibility of the University.—

By the accessibility of the University I mean much more than that the University should be situated in the city, and not relegated to a suburb. The situation of the University is undoubtedly a very important matter, but, fortunately, not one calling for consideration in view of the fact that the University is already established on North terrace. By the accessibility of the University I mean especially that the University shall be open to every class of the community. No community can be said to be organized on truly democratic lines if the education of its youth is conditioned by the length of the paternal purse. This will be conceded by every one; but a difference of opinion may exist regarding the means for effecting the end in view. One thing, however, ought to be clear. The University exists as a school of training for the abler youths. No doubt every citizen would be the better in a sense for a university training; but, in a world where art is long and time is fleeting, the imperative need is to provide an educational system which will prepare the student for life. The time spent at the different educational institutions, and the character of the discipline imparted by those institutions, should vary according to the aptitude of individual students. The University is the summit of the educational structure, and its discipline is for those students, from whatever class they may come, who are naturally fitted to discharge the duties which are most exacting as regards their intellectual equipment and ability. The fact has an important bearing upon the problem of the means of making the University easily accessible. Some reformers urge the abolition of fees; but the following objections to this scheme, if not fatal, are at least serious:—1. The change would involve a serious additional burden on the taxpayer. 2. The change would be inadequate for the purpose of meeting the special end in view—that of enabling the child of the poorer parent to take a university course. Such a child, in many cases, especially if his parents live out of the city or suburban area, needs maintenance as well as exemption from fees. 3. The change in question might easily result in an excessive proportion of children of well-to-do parents crowding the University classes. Even under existing conditions a certain number of students attend who are not specially fitted to profit by the discipline of a university course. If the fees were abolished, this class of student would be increased. For these reasons I am personally not inclined to view with favour the proposal to abolish the University fees. I think the end in view would be more advantageously met by a liberal system of State bursaries, so far as concerns candidates for a university degree. A great deal might be said, however, in favour of reducing the fees in the case of students attending evening classes at the University for the purpose of studying particular subjects. I limit my remarks to the class of student for which the university discipline is especially provided—the candidates for a degree.

—III. The Adequate Equipment of the University.—

A university which is to fulfil national purposes must not only be open to the talented youth of every class. When it receives youths it must be able to give them the best possible training. The interests of the community as a whole are vitally concerned in this matter. It is a fact which cannot be ignored that the national wellbeing is conditioned by the progress of other countries. Seeley, when speaking of the advantages of political organization on a vast scale, remarks that the

small State may flourish in a world of small States, but in a world of large States it can only exist by sufferance. Its economic efficiency and its very existence are endangered. A similar reflection is suggested by the rapid advance and diffusion of education. If a community is indifferent to the efficiency of its higher education, its indifference is not so vital a matter where other communities are also indifferent; but if, as is the case to-day, other communities are not indifferent, the community which is indifferent imperils the material interests of every class of its citizens. The conflict of nations to-day is not a conflict of arms so much as a conflict in industry in a wide sense. In the course of that conflict success will depend not alone upon the skill of the worker, but also, and even more upon trained intelligence. The strong arm is good; but the determining factor in the struggle will be brains. The more brains in the community, and the more highly trained those brains, the greater will be the chance that the community will hold its own in the struggle for existence. "Brute force, strength, bravery, and material welfare," says Karl Pearson, "have been in turn dominant in the State. To-morrow will be marked by the dominance of intelligence. The most intelligent nation will be victorious in the struggle." "We are suffering to-day," says a recent President of the British Association, "because trade no longer follows the flag, as in the old days, but follows the brains. In one chemical establishment in Germany, 400 doctors of science, the best those universities can turn out, have been employed at different times in late years. In the United States, the most successful students in the higher teaching centres are snapped up the moment they have finished their course, and put into charge of large concerns." There are some people in this State to-day who look upon the University as a mere institution for the training of lawyers and doctors. Even if it were such an institution, it would of course serve highly important public purposes, as the individual who finds himself in the Law Courts or the hospital will discover. As a matter of fact, however, the law and medical students are only a small section of the University students—a section which, at any rate so far as the law students are concerned, is mainly self-supporting. The vast majority of the students belong to other classes. There are courses of study for those who are to become the teachers of the primary, high, or secondary schools throughout the country. There are courses of study in commerce, finance, accountancy, &c., for those who are to become the captains of industry in the future. There are courses in law, economics, and politics for those who are to become, it may be, statesmen or Judges. There are courses in engineering and in mining. The University is—or, at last, should be—an institution for training the leaders of men in every department of the national life, and for making available for all classes of the community the latest researches of modern culture and science. It is a wise policy to look well after the training of the soldiers in our industrial army; but, if in doing so we fail to provide an adequate training for our captains and generals, we invite catastrophe in the sphere of industrial conflict as certainly as a nation is doomed on the field of battle when it places good soldiers under the guidance of indifferent generalship. Now, if a university is to these great purposes, it must be maintained in a high degree of efficiency. If it is to be so maintained, it must be generously endowed either by private individuals or by the State. If, for example, its teaching staff is less generously treated than the teaching staff in rival institutions elsewhere, it will be difficult to get the best talent, and still more difficult to retain it. Further, the library, apparatus, &c., must be up-to-date. At the very foreground of all means for democratising a university I place the maintenance of a high standard of efficiency, so that the youth of this State will be at least on a level with the youth of other States in the opportunities afforded for their mental development, for if this danger be not guarded against the whole community must suffer. These remarks have a special application to-day when our community is enjoying the results of an unexampled period of prosperity; but, even apart from such prosperity, the argument would hold good. When Prussia lay bleeding after the historic defeat of Jena, damaged in prestige, and crippled in finance, it laid a sure foundation for the future by at once establishing four new universities. The effort involved immediate sacrifices, but the outlay has been rewarded a hundredfold; and the German nation is probably the most efficient community industrially of the modern world.