

Register May 28<sup>th</sup> 1885.

## UNIVERSITY REFORM.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—As the subject of our University degree tests is before the public eye, it might be a spoke in the wheel if you can find space in the *Register* for an article from the *Examiner* (New York) of February 26, which discusses recent action taken at the long-established College of Harvard.

I am, Sir, &c., SENATUS.

President Eliot and the Harvard faculty are to be admired for having the courage of their convictions, and for carrying out their ideas with logical rigour. The assault on the classics made by Mr. Charles Francis Adams, jun., in his now famous address before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, however much it may have disgusted the Conservatives among the Harvard alumni and faculty, was in line with the policy of President Eliot from the beginning, and has now received the full approval of the faculty. The study of Greek is no longer necessary for the taking of a degree at Harvard. It may be well to trace the successive steps by which this result has been reached. The first concession was the abolition of the old fixed curriculum, and the substitution in part of the elective principle. This was done with caution at first, and students were permitted to elect part of their studies in the senior and junior years. As a next step all the studies of those two years were made elective. Then the elective principle began to encroach upon the freshman and sophomore years, and they were thrown open to the choice of the student in great part. Within a year the final step was taken as regards the College course by making the study of Greek and Latin no longer necessary for the taking of a degree. Students now have full liberty of choice in all the classes, and may take such a course of study as they or their parents may determine, being required only to reach such a grade of proficiency in the studies chosen as to deserve a degree. It was at once seen when this last step had been taken that it was absurd to require a young man to study Greek three or four years in a preparatory school in order to secure admission to Harvard, and then to permit him to drop Greek instantly. Ordinary fairness and consistency imposed on the College the obligation to make Greek optional with students for admission also. So argued President Eliot and Mr. Adams, and a report in accordance with this principle has just been adopted by the faculty by a vote of thirty to two. From the scheme of studies reprinted in the *Examiner* the applicant must select subjects for examination according to one of four methods—(a) All the elementary studies and at least two of the advanced studies; (b) all the elementary studies except either German or French, and at least three of the advanced studies; (c) all the elementary studies with the exception of either Greek or Latin, and at least four advanced studies; or (d) all the elementary studies with the exception of either Greek or Latin, and of either German or French, and at least five advanced studies. The young man who does not wish to study

the young man who does not wish to study Greek may choose either of the last two methods; if he prefers the old course he may take either of the first two methods. It will be noted that the "elementary" studies are still required in either Latin or Greek, and that only one of them can be wholly omitted; and that in return for that concession a large amount of additional work in mathematics, physical science, and the modern languages is exacted. The evident intention is to make the student who does not take Greek (or Latin) do an amount of work in something else that will be a full equivalent of that from which he is released. This is just. Mr. Adams has contended all along that he did not seek any lowering of the standard of acquirement, or any concessions to the laziness of students. The substance of his petition was that Harvard should no longer require studies that were (as he thought) of no possible utility to many graduates, instead of giving them instruction in the things that would be practically useful to them in after life. It is an interesting experiment that Harvard is making, and all friends of liberal education will be glad that it is to be tried. There is but one way to decide the questions in dispute between the advocates of classical and non-classical training, and that is by practically testing the two systems side by side during a series of years. The tests made in Germany, though perhaps not absolutely conclusive, do not warrant any high expectation of the result of Harvard's experiment. In the meantime other Colleges will do well to wait and see the result before they follow Harvard's lead.

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In a letter which we published yesterday Mr. Lindsay Leary defends himself and his papers on the Adelaide University from the attack made upon them by "Theoretikos." He maintains that the matriculation examination here is harder than it is in London, and sets himself to work to demolish his opponent's arguments. Without going so far as Mr. Leary, who insinuates that "Theoretikos" is an insincere advocate and unscrupulous weaver of arguments, we

may point out that, in comparing Adelaide with London, he has made a fundamental mistake. The conditions of life in Adelaide and London are different, and so are the conditions of education. In a young community this must be so. Men are so busily engaged in laying the foundations of their country's prosperity that they have little time to devote to literature. This has a twofold result. The parents have no time to make a life's study of culture. Hard work has perhaps rubbed out from their memory the record of what they once learned, and with the knowledge the taste for acquiring more has also gone. A Sir Stafford Northcote, who takes up his Greek play as a refreshment after his work in Parliament, is not to be found in colonial life as yet. Our professional men, our merchants and politicians, have had little time to keep up their reading, and it follows from this that the rising generation does not live in an atmosphere of culture. The schoolboy has two worlds—the world of school and the world of home. In England it not infrequently happens that his home is also his school. He moves amongst people who have read and who have a general knowledge of books. The average Australian schoolboy has no such advantages. Education is to him confined to school hours, and the information which comes almost by intuition to his English fellow is here only acquired by sensible effort. This is an inevitable

condition of life in a young country, and it is one which does not perhaps receive its due share of attention in such discussions as those which we now notice. It is manifest, then, that it is unfair as yet to compare the standard of education in Australia with the standard in England. Gradually information is becoming more widely spread, and even now books are read with an avidity which is rare in parts of the old country.

The whole question as to the lowering of the standard for matriculation depends upon what we conceive matriculation to be, and this in its turn depends upon what we conceive to be the objects of a University. Granting that the standard of education in South Australia is lower than the standard in England, what work should the Adelaide University set itself to do? There is a growing tendency to make this institution primarily a test of the value of the instruction given in the schools, and, secondarily, a general examining body. In the ordinary course of things a boy's success at a University is naturally taken everywhere as a testimonial to the school, and it is chiefly because our community is small that the effect is more clearly to be distinguished here. That effect is certainly pernicious. The schools lay themselves out to prepare pupils for examinations. The boys may "get education" as some people talk about "getting religion,"