

ROMANTIC INCEPTION AND RAPID GROWTH.

By Chas. R. Hodge (late Registrar).

The Act of Incorporation was passed in 1874, but academic work did not begin until 1876. The University began in a very modest way. It was a weak child and its parents, instead of being allowed to bring it up as they desired, were harassed by prescriptions from both press and public.

After 50 years of strenuous work in its development it is good to visualize the actual beginnings in March, 1876, when the complete teaching staff of four professors met their 13 students, four only of whom entered as undergraduates. The only accommodation was one room at the training college, lent by the Education Department and equipped by the University. The arts and science courses were the only ones open to prospective students. The question of division of the 13 candidates, so as to give each learned professor something to do must have assumed a somewhat Gilbertian aspect. Verily there was but a very small trickle at the source of the University River, but it has flowed on steadily through five decades, gathering in volume until it has assumed the proportions of a noble stream, bearing much precious freight.

Its career appeals to me as somewhat romantic when one looks back with a fairly full realization of the ups and downs, and periods of elation and disappointment during those 50 years, and considers what the University is to-day. For four-fifths of that period I had the privilege of serving the institution, of taking some small part in its development, and in sharing its periods of anxiety, success, and jubilation.

The Day of Small Things.

In its early days the University met with much criticism, particularly in the eighties, from both press and public, the council being frequently taken to task. The small community, as a whole, did not manifest much interest in it, while those who did so became impatient at the snail-like progress. Complaints were made in regard to the paucity of students and the small number of degrees conferred. One newspaper, in commenting on the results of the examinations at the close of a year, and the few candidates who completed the course, remarked that "either the work was badly done, or that there was not enough work to do," but subsequently admitted, "that the first of the suppositions might be dismissed at once."

Considerable criticism, usually of a destructive character from anonymous correspondents also appeared in the press. Being anonymous, it was naturally ignored by the council, whereas had such communications been sent to the council in the form of suggestions, something of a constructive nature may have eventuated, and the writers would have had the satisfaction of knowing that they had assisted the executive, whose sole object in their legislation was the good of the community. During my period of office as registrar whenever a person came to me with a grievance, real or imaginary, and could not be satisfied, I urged him to write to the council and state his case, assuring him that it would be considered and that he would receive a courteous reply.

Generous Founders and Competent Directors.

The University, however, was founded upon a rock and governed by gentlemen of education, wide experience, business acumen, and high motives, who freely devoted their time and talents to the building up of this seat of learning. Theirs was a noble ideal, and although at times they must have felt discouraged, they were men of vision and purpose, not to be deterred from the path of what they conceived to be their duty.

The University had its origin in romantic circumstances, as the possibility of its creation came from the gift to Union College (a college for training divinity students) by Sir W. W. Hughes (then Mr. Hughes). It is not once in a lifetime that one would hear of one institution handing over such a large sum of money to another for the reason that it was really more than it needed. It was, however, a magnanimous act, and results have amply demonstrated that the generous impulse which stirred the governors of Union College, was an eminently wise one, and eventuated in the greatest benefit to the community. The names of those governors, particularly the Rev. J. Lyall and Rev. Dr. Jefferis, will ever be held in honour by the State in general and the University in particular. It is a matter for regret that not one of those who so heartily and generously supported the foundation of the University has lived to witness its jubilee.

After Union College handed the £20,000 over for University purposes, the late Sir Thomas Elder placed another £20,000 alongside of it. Steps were then taken to secure the necessary Act of Incorporation and other legislative enactments.