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## The admission of religious nonconformists to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and to degrees in those universities, 1828–1871

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THE ADMISSION OF RELIGIOUS NONCONFORMISTS  
TO THE UNIVERSITIES OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE  
and to Degrees in those Universities, 1828-1871

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

Valerie K. Lund

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APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the political, intellectual, philosophical, and attitudinal changes in nineteenth-century England which allowed religious Nonconformists to gain admission to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and to proceed to degrees in those universities. The process covered a period of forty years, during which the issue was debated in pamphlets, periodicals, sermons, and on the floor of Parliament. All of the above forums have been studied to ascertain the changes in thought that were necessary to effect the political legislation which finally admitted Nonconformists to the universities.

The study suggests that the issue of Dissenters at the universities was a part of the larger topic of overall nineteenth-century reform. The breakdown of the Tory concept of church and state, the end of Anglican control of higher education, and a modification in the concept of the purpose of education were all elements in the reforms which admitted Nonconformists.

## INTRODUCTION

The repeal in 1828 of the Test and Corporation Acts, which had limited the holding of public office to members of the Church of England, represented recognition of the fact that theoretical civil disabilities imposed on Protestant Dissenters were incongruous with their rising actual economic and social position. In part, such legal restrictions were just that--theoretical. Dissenters did hold public office before 1828; "occasional conformity" or outright misrepresentation allowed them to do so. But there was a large number of Nonconformists for whom such "conformity" was unconscionable. For these people, repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was an open declaration that dissenting from the Church of England was no ground for political disabilities. This was still largely a theoretical concession on the part of the Establishment, however. In fact, numerous forms of civil discrimination remained. Nonconformists could not legally be married in their own chapels, for example, nor could they be buried in their own churchyards. The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was a victory which made Dissenters more self-conscious and assertive as a group. It generated strength to go on and fight these other disabilities.

One of the most odious classes of restrictions was that surrounding university education. Nonconformists were disallowed from entering Oxford; subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles upon matriculation had been required at that institution since 1581. Dissenters could attend Cambridge, but not take degrees there, as religious tests had been required upon graduation

since 1616. London University, which had been founded in 1828 as a Dissenting institution, did not have a charter and hence could not grant degrees.

In 1834, a bill which would have removed these educational disabilities was passed by the House of Commons but was rejected by the Lords. The arguments on the question continued for twenty years, the only advancement in the meantime being the granting of a charter to the University of London in 1837. With this measure Nonconformists were able for the first time to receive university degrees, but this was far from a satisfactory solution. In 1850, royal commissions were appointed to study conditions at Oxford and Cambridge and investigate the need for reform. A primary effect of the activities of the commissions was once again to raise the consciousness of both politicians and the university communities to the issue of religious tests required by the universities. The first substantial victory for Dissenters was achieved in 1854, when they were allowed to enter and receive baccalaureate degrees from Oxford. Two years later religious restrictions were lifted from degrees at Cambridge. Oaths of subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles were still required of candidates for the M.A. and higher degrees, though, and this was debated throughout the 1860s. It was not until 1871 that Nonconformists were allowed to hold university offices or fellowships at either university.

This paper will examine the process by which each of the above steps was achieved. Also investigated will be the response of the Church, which perceived its position and its very existence to be threatened. The arguments of conservative Church leaders showed the efforts of the Establishment to preserve itself as an institution in general and, particularly, its monopoly over university education.



This topic is important because of its place within the entire history of nineteenth-century reform. The demand for university education for Nonconformists was one element in the breaking down of the old order and its replacement by a new kind of English society. It was an attack on two of the most resistant strongholds of Toryism: the Anglican Church and the ancient universities. In this attack can be seen one of the many fronts where the established order found itself on the defensive and, ultimately, giving way.

The issue of admission of Dissenters to Oxford and Cambridge was closely connected with that of overall university reform. The universities were criticized as preserves of the upper classes, primarily because of the expense of tuition. The quality of instruction was generally poor; this was largely due to an inefficient teaching and administrative structure. There was rivalry between the colleges, which were wealthy, and the university, which was poor and had few educational functions. Fellowships were rarely awarded on the basis of merit, but rather because of patronage or familial connections. As people within and without the universities began to see the need for correcting abuses in the system of higher education, the exclusive nature of the universities was an integral part of all discussions of reform. Reform came earlier and more easily at Cambridge than at Oxford. It is thus not surprising that Cambridge was more liberal in its policies towards Dissenters during much of the period under examination.

A change in the entire concept of education was also involved in university reforms. Debate raged over whether the primary purpose--or indeed the only purpose--of a university was research and the extension of knowledge, or the instruction of students. The question was important, because it was much easier to argue that admission should be limited to

Churchmen if it was assumed that the purpose was the instruction of the minds which would lead society in the next generation.

Also in need of reform was the Church. Many people saw the Anglican Church as an expensive and unjustifiable monopoly. Very real abuses, such as pluralism, non-residence, and misappropriation of funds contributed to such criticisms. The conservative principle was that the Church of England was the English nation in its religious aspect; church and state were inseparable elements in a single compound. The facts did not prove this to be true. The religious census of 1851 showed that Victorian England was not overwhelmingly a religious nation, still less an Anglican nation. It was proposed by some that all churches should be put on an equal basis to compete for members--Free Trade extended to religion. Catholic Emancipation, repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and even the Reform Bill of 1832 were threats to the Established Church. The Church found itself on the defensive. The need for reform was clear to many Churchmen, but it appeared that outside forces were imposing change. The Church was not even being allowed to reform itself; rather its critics were demanding changes faster than the Church could respond to such demands. Further, conservatives doubted whether Parliament, comprising both Anglicans and non-Churchmen, was the appropriate body to legislate reform for the Church. Against such a background, the attack on the universities was seen as one more challenge to the concept of an established church, one of the basic principles of the old order.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the arguments in this paragraph are based on those of Norman Gash in Chap. 2 of Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965).

In contemporary literature, there is little agreement on the meaning of the term Dissenter. It apparently was originally meant to apply to anyone who dissented from the Church of England, including Roman Catholics, and even occasionally extended to non-Christians. Gradually, the designation came to be limited in common use to those people who were legally called Protestant Dissenters. Sometimes a distinction was made between Dissenter and Nonconformist, the latter meaning those who not only dissented from the Church of England and its doctrines and practices, but also disagreed in principle with the existence of a national church. An 1839 article in the Eclectic Review pointed out the difference:

The Protestant Dissenters of English History, in whose favour the provisions of the 'Toleration Act' were originally intended to operate, consist of three denominations which have branched from the original Nonconformists; viz., the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists (or Independents), and the Baptists.<sup>2</sup>

This distinction was never strictly adhered to, though. For the purposes of this paper, the terms Dissenter and Nonconformist will be used interchangeably and will mean all Protestants who were outside the Church of England, that is, all of the sects described below.

In popular use, Dissent usually included the three denominations named in the quote above. Presbyterians comprised both English Presbyterians and Orthodox, or Scottish, Presbyterians. English Presbyterians were also known as Unitarians and, since they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, were not always included even within the scope of Christianity. After 1830, the Orthodox Presbyterians gradually displaced the English Presbyterians as the Presbyterian Church of England. The Baptist church was similarly subdivided into Particular, or Calvinist, Baptists and General,

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<sup>2</sup>Eclectic Review 5 (January 1839): 4.

or Arminian, Baptists, the two being fairly equally divided in strength throughout the nation. Often, two other groups were added to these three in the meaning of Dissent: Quakers and Methodists. There were three divisions within Methodism: Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists, and the New Connection. In numbers, Methodists were equal to all other Dissenters combined.

Dissent was far from an organized or monolithic body in terms of either doctrine and practice, or political structure. There was no effective structure which coordinated Dissenting activities, although there were occasional attempts, varying in success, at forming congresses comprising representative of the various Dissenting bodies. There existed schisms: between those with strong central organizations and those with congregationalist structures; between "new" Dissenters, such as Methodists, and the older groups; between groups believing in differing forms of baptism. The Eclectic Review described Dissent as "a very large portion of the English nation, including several distinct denominations, among whom is to be found a very wide difference of opinion on all subjects, political as well as ecclesiastical."<sup>3</sup> Some accepted the idea of a state church, but criticized Anglican dogma or forms. These comprised most Presbyterians (including all Unitarians) and Wesleyan Methodists. On the other hand, Quakers, Baptists, and most Congregationalists opposed, to differing degrees, the very existence of an established church. It was this latter group who fought most strenuously the civil disabilities and impositions associated with Establishment: tithes, political restrictions, and, of particular importance here, the educational monopoly of the Church of England.

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<sup>3</sup>Eclectic Review 8 (December 1832): 527.

There is good reason for the struggle with Oxford and Cambridge to have been the exclusive battle of the Protestant Dissenters, as opposed to Roman Catholics and other religious groups outside of the Church of England. Protestant Dissenters were the largest religious minority. The religious census of 1851 showed that approximately seven million people, or 36 per cent of the total population, attended church. The numbers of Anglicans and Dissenters were roughly equal, although this varied with locality and size of city. In Wales and parts of England, Dissenters even outnumbered Churchmen. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, made up only four per cent of the churchgoers. Other groups--Jews, Socinians, and splinter sects--were even more negligible.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond sheer numbers, Dissenters were the most educable religious minority. As the older Nonconformist groups had grown, they had extended both upward and downward on the social scale from their original position of largely lower middle class. With the Industrial Revolution, Dissent came to include people of considerable wealth and some of relatively high social status. Further, the mid-nineteenth century was a period of increased religious activity for the middle classes, which included a great many Nonconformists. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, as described by David Martin, "basically comprised a stream of English Catholics, a trickle of converts, and a flood of Irish."<sup>5</sup> Hence, the largest part of that four

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<sup>4</sup>I recognize that church attendance is not an accurate indicator of the actual religious preference of the population at large. However, these are the best figures available for the period. Also, there exists no reason to believe that any religious group attended church in numbers out of proportion to its absolute numbers in society. My figures are based on a study of the religious census done by David A. Martin and presented in A Sociology of English Religion (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), pp. 16-24. For more detail, see W. S. F. Pickering, "The Religious Census of 1851--A Useless Experiment?" British Journal of Sociology 18 (December 1967): 382-407, and K. S. Inglis, "Patterns of Worship in 1851," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 11 (April 1960): 74-86.

<sup>5</sup>Martin, p. 23.

per cent of the population which was Catholic was made up of Irish who immigrated in the 1840s and 1850s. They were poor and had more immediate demands than access to university education. Contrasted to Roman Catholics, Nonconformists were far more socially mobile and stronger among the trading and entrepreneurial occupational groups. Roman Catholics lived in greatest numbers in the Northwest (especially Lancashire) and in London. Dissenters were most heavily concentrated in the Northeast, the Southwest, and Wales. Except for Wales, these latter areas were those which sent the greatest proportion of their populations to the universities. Nonconformists generally lived in the country, small towns, and the suburbs. Urban centers did not contain highly educated populations, and this was where most Roman Catholics settled, only gradually moving out from the cities. As compared with Nonconformists, Roman Catholics were not a group who felt particularly disabled by the restriction of university education to members of the Church of England.

Further, there was an ideological gulf between Roman Catholics and Dissenters which kept them from cooperating in the fight for admission to Oxford and Cambridge. It is true that both groups were outside the mainstream of English society because of their religious beliefs. Before 1829, Dissenters were strongly in favor of Catholic Emancipation as part of a move toward greater religious toleration in general. However, the two groups were at opposite ends of the scale in terms of belief. Many differences of dogma outweighed the commonality of being the victims of religious intolerance. This effect was strengthened with the appearance of the Tractarians, who gave Dissenters cause to fear that Anglicanism was moving even further away from them doctrinally, making Roman Catholicism the antagonist. Many people who opposed easing restrictions on Dissenters (including the members of the Oxford Movement) were drawing criticism themselves from those who feared "popery."

This paper is limited to Oxford and Cambridge. The University of London will be treated only as it affected the opening of the older universities to Nonconformists. It is true that the University of Durham existed as an Anglican institution. It was founded in 1832 through a grant from the chapter and dean of the cathedral. The university received its charter only after a two-year delay created by the demands of some Nonconformists to make it a non-sectarian university. The Universities Tests Act of 1871, which finally opened the universities to Dissenters, applied to Durham, as well as to Oxford and Cambridge. However, the agitation for admission was directed overwhelmingly toward Oxford and Cambridge. Durham played only a very small role, for several reasons. First, the age of Oxford and Cambridge gave them their prestige, and it was the prestige of an Oxford or Cambridge degree that, in large measure, attracted Dissenters. Second, Dissenters did not need a university in the North. Dissenters were more numerous in the North only relative to the Anglican population. In absolute numbers, Dissenters were slightly stronger in the South. For those Dissenters who did live in the North, Scottish universities provided an option open to them and precluded the need for demanding admission to Durham. Third, Durham was a very small university in the mid-nineteenth century, such that it could not have taken pressure off of Oxford and Cambridge to admit large number of Nonconformists.

## CHAPTER I

Admission of Nonconformists to Oxford and Cambridge was not a totally new issue in the 1830s. There had been some discussion and agitation as early as the 1750s. During the 1770s, particularly, pamphlets were written to argue the case, though these pamphlets were not as numerous, nor their arguments as heated, as those that were to follow sixty years later.

One of the early pamphleteers was William Friend, Fellow and Tutor of Jesus College, Cambridge. In 1789 he published Thoughts on Subscription to Religious Tests, Particularly that Required by the University of Cambridge for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, in which he argued that religious restrictions should be removed. He opened his argument with the observation that the Christian church in general had often been guilty of cruel discrimination, contrary to its teachings of the brotherhood of mankind. The Church of England in particular had, throughout its history, displayed such distinctly un-Christian behavior.

[T]he church afforded sufficient reason to a heathen emperor to declare, that of all savage beasts he had either seen or heard of, a christian was the worst. The history indeed of the church lays open to our view scarce any thing but scenes of deadly feud: . . . the english church with the dissenters, each exercised against the other the most inveterate malice and cruelty. . . .

Yes! the philosopher and every man of feeling and honour must be shocked at the very name of the church, a name



inimical to virtue, inimical to religion, inimical to the best and dearest right of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

His argument continued with the assertion that, aside from the inhumanity of the discrimination against Dissenters on the part of the universities, such restrictions were wrong for two other reasons. First, Dissenters were Christians and differed from Anglicans only in form, not in the basics of belief. Second, oaths required at Cambridge stated that the recipient of a degree be a bona fide member of the Church of England. Frend defined this to mean accepting all elements of the faith. Frend's Thoughts said that a young man of university age could not possibly be well enough versed in doctrine to know whether he subscribed fully to all tenets of Anglicanism.<sup>2</sup>

Frend proceeded to anticipate the conservative argument that the church and state were so closely interconnected within the English constitution that such an attack on the church as Frend suggested would have been tantamount to an attack on the state, an attack that would eventually mean the destruction of the constitution. He simply denied the validity of such concerns.

I take the liberty, Sir, of denying this proposition, in the whole and in all its parts. With respect to the attack, I deny that the church is attacked: and were an attack made on the church, I deny that it would be detrimental to the state. Would the state be ruined, if all kinds of subscription were removed, whether the subscribers be parsons or doctors of physic? Would soldiers be less courageous? Would our sailors be less daring? Would the clergy be less pious? Would the stocks rise or fall a single farthing on that account? Would the members of our house of commons be less zealous in the support of our rights? Would

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<sup>1</sup>William Frend, Thoughts on Subscription to Religious Tests, Particularly that Required by the University of Cambridge for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, 2 ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1789), Preface, iv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-11.

the taxes be increased? In short, Sir, you would do mankind a favour, by mentioning a single circumstance which can countenance the absurd position of danger to the state, from the removal of our subscriptions.<sup>3</sup>

Because of his writings, Frend was removed from his tutorship. His pamphlet, though, forecast two of the most important questions that would be involved in the next eighty years of debate. First, the degree to which Dissent differed from the Established church was a basic point on which a conclusion had to be reached. If the differences were only a matter of form, rather than doctrine, subscription could not be easily justified. Secondly, the degree to which the universities were a vital element in the English constitution and its corollary concept of church and state was also basic to settling the issue of admitting Dissenters.

Frend and his contemporaries failed to make their arguments heard, largely because of the distractions of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. When attention was returned to domestic affairs, the movement for religious toleration within the universities resumed. Sir William Hamilton can be credited with beginning the discussions once again. Hamilton, a Scot, was a graduate of Balliol, Oxford, and a professor of history at the University of Edinburgh. In 1831 and 1834 he published in the Edinburgh Review a series of articles calling for the reform of the ancient English universities. His 1831 articles dealt with the need for general reform at Oxford. He decried what Oxford had become and indicated that it was far more corrupt than Cambridge.

Comparing what it actually is with what it possibly could be, Oxford is, of all academical institutions, at once the most imperfect and the most perfectible. . . . As now administered, this university pretends only

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

to accomplish a petty fraction of the ends proposed<sup>4</sup>  
to it by law, and attempts this only by illegal means.

The problem, according to Hamilton, was that the structure of the universities, especially Oxford, no longer coincided with the intended structure. The original constitution of the universities provided for them to be teaching institutions. The colleges had grown up to take care of the lodging and feeding needs of the students. But the colleges had become jealous and unlawfully usurped most of the educational functions, leaving the universities to be merely administrative and largely decorative rather than truly functional. The universities still awarded degrees. But because professors no longer provided the necessary instruction, degrees were not an accurate indication of learning accomplished by persons receiving those degrees. College tutors, who were intended to be assistants and merely augment the professors' teaching, had taken over all real teaching functions. Tutors were fellows of the various colleges and were not chosen because of ability. Virtually all fellowships had restrictions attached to them. They were to be awarded to members of certain families or residents of certain counties. Most fellowships were so closed that there were only one or two candidates for any one position, and even then the recipient might be predetermined. The result of this was that tutors were not the most capable men available; hence, learning suffered.

In his 1834 articles Hamilton proceeded to apply the foregoing arguments to the demands of Dissenters for admission. The Dissenters' position arose from the ambiguous state of the universities. Hamilton asserted that there was no question as to the right of any person to attend the

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<sup>4</sup>Sir William Hamilton, Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1861), p. 384.

universities, which were public, national institutions. The colleges, however, were private corporations with the right to admit or exclude whom-  
ever they chose. Had the universities been the centers of learning that they were meant to be, admission to them would have provided the solution. But as it was, admission to the universities meant nothing without admission to a college.

Hamilton declared invalid the argument that the primary purpose of the universities was religious rather than literary and scientific instruction. If this argument were to be accepted, he stated, the universities would have been correct in imposing religious restrictions on its applicants. That was not the case, though. The colleges were religious, sectarian institutions, but the universities were not. Further, the professional instruction in religion took place in the Faculty of Theology, not the Faculty of Arts. It was to the latter that the Nonconformists demanded admission.

One solution which Hamilton suggested was to admit Dissenters to the university and allow them to found their own colleges or halls. Short of this, he saw no answer aside from complete reform of the universities.

The actual state of education in these institutions is entitled no respect, as contrary at once to law and to reason; and . . . all inconveniences [involved in admitting Dissenters] disappear the moment the universities are in the state to which law and reason demand they be restored. . . . Trustees [of the colleges] have, for their proper interest, violated the public duty; and for the petty ends of their own private institutions, abolished the great national establishment, of whose progressive improvement they had solemnly vowed to be the faithful guardians.<sup>5</sup>

He called upon Parliament as the one body capable of restoring the universities to their original constitutions, taking issue with those who

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 459.

said that Parliament did not have the right to interfere with the internal affairs of the universities.

The validity of this argument supposes the truth of one or other of two assumptions, both of which are utterly, and even notoriously false. It supposes, either that the sovereign legislature has not the right of making and unmaking the statutes of the national schools, or that a competent authority having once imposed an oath to the observance of certain laws, the same authority can not afterward relieve from the obligation, when it abrogates the very laws to which that oath is relative. Of these assumptions, the latter is sufficiently refuted by the very terms of its statement, and the former requires only a removal of the grossest ignorance to make its absurdity equally palpable. . . . It will not be contended that the King, Lords, and Commons, can not do that to which the King is singly competent.<sup>6</sup>

Hamilton was widely criticized for his harsh treatment of Oxford. His articles, though, whether liked or disliked, had the effect of making a great many people consider the Dissenters' grievances for the first time. In a letter of 10 March 1835 to Hamilton, Lord Radnor remarked that

The perusal of your different articles in the "Edinburgh Review" of 1831 and of last year has much enlarged my views on the subject; and my object is now, if possible, to throw open the universities altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Many of Hamilton's criticisms of the universities were justified. The universities were poor, while many of the colleges were wealthy but made little contribution to higher learning. There did exist restrictions on most fellowships limiting them to the founder's kin, or persons from a particular area, or graduates of a particular school. This led to abuses and meant that the colleges contained many members who were incompetent and useless. Tuition at the colleges was so poor that it was a common practice for wealthy students to hire private "coaches" to provide the instruction

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 514-15.

<sup>7</sup>John Veitch, Memoir of Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1899), p. 166.

that the tutors were failing to provide. And it was true that the professors did not make up for the shortcomings of the tutors. Adam Smith was forced to comment upon his experience at Cambridge: "Professors had all but given up even the pretense of teaching."<sup>8</sup>

It was partly due to the existence of these kinds of abuses in the universities that the Dissenters were eventually successful in gaining admission. It was hard for anyone to deny the universities' shortcomings. Because many people recognized the need for change, the liberals were able to play on this and show its connection to the religious inequities and thus weaken conservative resistance. It was Hamilton who began this line of argument.

The religious life within the Establishment itself was also in need of reform at Oxford and Cambridge. Gladstone, recalling his undergraduate experience at Oxford in the 1820s, remarked, "The state of religion in Oxford is the most painful spectacle which ever fell my lot to behold."<sup>9</sup> Elliott-Binns, in Religion in the Victorian Era, quotes R. F. Horton, a member of Oxford University: "We were amazed at the far richer religious life at the sister university."<sup>10</sup> And G. L. Pilkington of Cambridge said, "The religious movement in Cambridge was leaving poor old Oxford a long way behind."<sup>11</sup> This was true to a large measure because Cambridge had been more influenced by eighteenth-century rationalism and early nineteenth-century

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Brian Simon, Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960), p. 85.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Vivian H. H. Green, A History of Oxford University (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1974), p. 168.

<sup>10</sup>R. F. Horton, Autobiography, p. 36. Quoted in Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1936), p. 324.

Evangelicalism than Oxford had been. Because of that, reform movements had started earlier in Cambridge, in fact as early as the 1770s. Jesus College was the center of reform, as evidenced by Frennd. Though the reform movements at Cambridge did not survive the eighteenth century and had to be reborn, one lasting effect was that religion was far more on the decline at Oxford than at Cambridge by the 1820s and 1830s. This was important because reforming the universities inevitably included reforming their religious life. The religious establishment at Oxford was more threatened and thus more on the defensive, making reform harder. Cambridge's religious establishment had already been through the process of reform.

The fact that both universities were religious institutions--to some degree at least--made all reform difficult. Changes could come only by breaking down, or at least limiting, the semi-ecclesiastical character of the colleges and the Church's hold over the universities. The universities were weak intellectually, because teachers saw their role as that of transmitting a body of orthodox knowledge, not encouraging original or speculative thinking. Mark Pattison, one of the most important and influential of the Oxford reformers, wrote of his tutors as an undergraduate at Balliol in the 1830s:

They were before all things clergymen, with all the prepossessions of orthodox clergymen, and incapable of employing classical antiquity as an instrument of mental culture. At most, they saw in Greek and Latin a medium for establishing "the truth of Christianity."<sup>12</sup>

Hence, reform movements at the universities were almost always anticlerical in tone, in spite of the fact that many of the reformers were themselves clergymen. Dissenters found a natural alliance with such men who were not anti-religious, but disliked the status of religion at Oxford and Cambridge.

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<sup>12</sup>Mark Pattison, Memoirs (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885), p. 27.

Hamilton's articles created much negative reaction. One of his rebutters was William Sewell, fellow of Queens, Oxford. In 1834 he published a pamphlet, Thoughts on the Admission of Dissenters to the University of Oxford, and on the Establishment of a State Religion. Later that year he amplified some of the arguments made in that pamphlet in A Second Letter to a Dissenter on the Opposition of the University of Oxford to the Charter of the London College. His argument began with an explanation of the nature of education. Oxford and Cambridge provided religious education because they were the places to train the future leaders of society in the principles of morality.

It is the great principle of this University that mere knowledge and mere talent are not to be placed before the young, as objects of their ambition or respect. . . . We are not so impressed with the grandeur, the grasp, the sureness, or the perfectibility of human intellect, as to think it at all commensurate with the real post and dignity of a reasoning being. . . .

We desire to send into the world, not a few brilliant meteors to astonish and perplex their generation, but a number of honest, well-informed, sensible men, who each in a limited sphere may be a blessing and an honour to their country. . . . In one word, we would stand to the young--first as their moral guardians and then as their instructors in learning. And such is the foundation of our system.<sup>13</sup>

The means by which such training in morality would be accomplished was the Christian religion.

We do not know how to make men good, supposing goodness to be separate from religion, without employing Christianity as an instrument. . . . The great and constant problem of morals, is the art of making men good. And we know but one solution, which is, to make them Christian.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>William Sewell, Thoughts on the Admission of Dissenters to the University of Oxford, and on the Establishment of a State Religion (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1834), pp. 7-9.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.



Sewell would have been reluctant to admit Dissenters even on the condition of conversion, because their background was so different from that of Churchmen. But because religion was the one method by which the goal of education could be met, without conversion admission was impossible.

If their conversion is prohibited, we will not consent to take the charge. We will not affect to educate, where the great end of education is excluded. We will not pretend to control, when the great engine of control is taken from our hands.<sup>15</sup>

Sewell did think Dissenters should be educated. "I wish, the whole Church must wish, that the Dissenters were steeped in learning. It would probably make us one."<sup>16</sup> Dissenters adhered to their beliefs only because they did not really understand theology. Education would correct their beliefs. But because the aim of education was to make men good for the purpose of leading society, a university degree granted certain privileges within that society. Dissenters were to be educated, according to Sewell, but to award them university degrees would have meant giving them a place in society which only Anglicans should hold.

Sewell believed that the connection between church and state was an essential part of the English constitution.

We shall believe the state has nothing to do with our religion, when we believe that it has nothing to do with our wealth, our peace, our arts, our morals, our knowledge; with any other interest or duty of human life.<sup>17</sup>

The admission of Dissenters to the universities would be detrimental to that connection.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>William Sewell, A Second Letter to a Dissenter on the Opposition of the University of Oxford to the Charter of the London College (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1834), p. 24.

<sup>17</sup>Sewell, Thoughts, p. 29.

Is it not in fact the severing of one more tie, which binds the state to the Church, and the Church to the State? And a tie of no little strength, but perhaps,<sup>18</sup> if it be duly considered, the strongest and the best?

We consider, we cannot but consider, that any authoritative interferences of the legislature, compelling us as its ministers and servants in the public education of their subjects, to comprehend within our walls Dissenters from the English communion, would be (not indeed the first--one step has been taken already) but another and rapid stride to the renunciation of any such connection.<sup>19</sup>

Sewell answered charges that the above arguments could not apply because Dissenters were Christian, distinguishable from Anglicans only in details, not fundamentals.

If these points of separation are so trivial, and so irrelevant to the real sincere profession of the Gospel, why does any separation exist? . . . Either we have divided the Christian world for nothing, or we have divided it on doctrines which have nothing to do with Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

To Sewell, Anglicanism was defined by its details, which were important, as well as by fundamentals. Being Christian was not enough; a person must be Anglican.

Does it [a religion] not cease to be a religion, without it assumes and maintains some definite shape and proportion? . . . Property in faith, like property in land, must have certain fixed boundaries and measures, or it ceases to be property at all. Our bounds may be narrow, or wide; they may draw us in within the compass of a foot, or stretch out to comprehend miles; but somewhere there must be limits.<sup>21</sup>

By admitting Nonconformists to Oxford and Cambridge, the English state would be saying that such boundaries, which defined Anglicanism, were unimportant--

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<sup>18</sup>Sewell, Second Letter, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>Sewell, Thoughts, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.

that religion was unimportant.

We cannot conceive a legislature which does not profess a religion. We cannot conceive a Christian legislature which does not profess the religion of Christ. We cannot admit the possibility of professing the religion of Christ, without professing peculiar tenets, and embracing some one form of opinion. . . . Christianity never admits of latitude and vagueness of doctrine.<sup>22</sup>

He then revealed bitterness and distrust towards Dissenters.

Let Dissenters come forward and acknowledge what, if they really are Christians, must, in all the impending conflict, be their real and uncompromising object; an object which none can mistake. . . . Let them avow openly and honestly, what if they do not feel, they are insulting their country and God, by false and hypocritical pretensions. We wish to undermine the Establishment. We wish to remove all its support in legislative sanctions, and public provisions. We propose to destroy it, not merely as an establishment but as a body.<sup>23</sup>

Every advantage conferred upon those [Dissenters] whose hostility at present is so openly and bitterly declared, and prosecuted with such imminent peril to every thing sacred and good, I look on with suspicion and alarm.<sup>24</sup>

Sewell concluded by denying the entire concept of religious toleration, both generally and within the universities.

I deny the right of liberty of conscience utterly and wholly. I deny the right of a child to poison itself; the right of a man to ruin himself; the right of a nation to indulge itself in any caprice or madness. . . . I deny the right of any sect to depart one atom from the standard which I hold to be the truth of Christianity. And I deny the right of any legislative power, of any minister of God, of any individual on earth, to sanction or permit it, without using every means in my power to control and bring them back from their errors.

We can admit of no compromise, no latitude, no comprehension, no indulgence in acts, whatever be our

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>24</sup>Sewell, Second Letter, p. 2.

indulgence in thought. And, therefore, when young men are brought here, and placed in our hands for education, we wish to make them not merely learned, but good; not merely good, but religious; not merely religious,<sup>25</sup> but Christians; not merely Christians, but Churchmen.

Sewell's writings were important, because they contained in outline all the conservatives' main arguments. His pamphlets were consistently referred to and quoted in parliamentary debates by the defenders of the Establishment for the following forty years.

Sewell's writings were just a part of a pamphlet war sparked by Hamilton's articles. Another writer was Thomas Turton, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and later Bishop of Ely. In Thoughts on the Admission of Persons without Regard to their Religious Opinions to Certain Degrees in the Universities of England, he came to the same conclusion as Sewell, but by different reasoning. He looked for an example of what would happen in a non-sectarian educational setting. He found such an example in Daventry Academy, a theological seminary which had been founded in Northampton in 1729 by a Dr. Doddington and which had educated young men of varying faiths until 1789. The school was set up as an experiment to see the results of an educational institution in which both the student body and the faculty were "perfectly catholic" (i.e., comprising a variety of Christian denominations). The method of teaching was to encourage each student to express his own opinions and, having heard different opinions expressed, form his own beliefs, accepting or rejecting any part of what he heard in the classroom. The results of this experiment were alarming to Turton.

The first consequence of this mode of conducting the lectures was to himself [one of the tutors] very unexpected and mortifying. Many of his pupils, and of those some of the best talents, the closest application, and the most serious dispositions, who had

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<sup>25</sup>Sewell, Thoughts, pp. 96, 19-20.

also been educated in all the habits and prepossessions of Trinitarian doctrine, to his great surprise became Unitarians.<sup>26</sup>

He quoted one of the students at Daventry, Thomas Toller, to show the dangers of such "catholic" education.

Thus a spirit of indifference to all religious principles was generated in the first instance, which naturally paved the way for the prompt reception of doctrines indulgent to the corruption, and flattering to the pride, or a depraved and fallen nature.<sup>27</sup>

Turton pointed out the experience at Daventry as a warning to all who would have Oxford and Cambridge opened to students from different faiths. He observed that even Nonconformists recognized the dangers inherent in such an integrated educational setting. That is why different Dissenting bodies set up their own schools and academies--Methodists distinct from Presbyterians and Quakers distinct from Baptists. "For the members of the Church of England I claim the same privilege."<sup>28</sup> He quoted several important Nonconformist leaders in support of that principle. Dr. J. P. Smith, Theological Tutor at Homerton and "one of the most eminent persons amongst the Dissenters, now living," had said,

To throw down before a company of inexperienced youths, a regular set of rival and discordant expositions, appears to me to have been a method not well calculated to lead into the path of convincing evidence and well ascertained truth. It might excite party feeling, wordy disputation, unholy levity, and rash decision.<sup>29</sup>

Another Nonconformist leader, Thomas Hall, had said the following in an address at the Baptist Academical Institution at Stepney:

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<sup>26</sup>Thomas Turton, Thoughts on the Admission of Persons without Regard to their Religious Opinions to Certain Degrees in the Universities of England (Cambridge: The Pitt Press, 1834), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

With regard to the principles we wish to see prevail in our future seminary, . . . they are the principles which distinguish the body of Christians denominated Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. While we feel a cordial esteem for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity--disclaiming all pretensions to that vaunted liberality which masks an indifference to revealed truth, we feel no hesitation in declaring, that nothing would give us more concern than to see the seminary we have in contemplation become the organ of infidel or retical pravity.<sup>30</sup>

Turton concluded that the system in effect at Oxford and Cambridge was correct.

A young man, on commencing residence in one of our Universities, finds himself consigned to a Tutor--as it were to another Parent; and he at once regards his associates as members of the same family with himself. There is no necessity for him to be on the reserve, till he can ascertain to what sect of religion any one belongs; for he is aware that, on the most important of all concerns, but one feeling exists. Nor does any thing occur, to disturb the prevailing sympathy. On the contrary, every thing tends to give it a new force. . . . To him, at his youthful time of life, religion is communicated, not in general terms--not through the turbid medium of controversy--but as it was understood by the Fathers of the Protestant Church of England. . . . It is for this end that, for a season, he is committed to our keeping; and for this we hold it to be our duty to provide.<sup>31</sup>

The chain of reactions continued. Turton was answered by a young lecturer, assistant tutor, and Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, Connop Thirwall.<sup>32</sup> Thirwall argued against the idea of a university as a "nursery for clergymen" and asserted that the presence of Dissenters would be a positive addition to Oxford and Cambridge. In the same year as Turton's Thoughts, Thirwall published A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Turton, D.D., on the Admission of Dissenters to Academical Degrees. Thirwall refuted the validity of the comparison of Oxford and Cambridge with the Daventry Academy

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>32</sup>Interestingly, forty years later, Thirwall succeeded Turton as Bishop of Ely.

by pointing out that the universities were not meant to be theological seminaries.

They are so far from being dedicated exclusively or principally to the study of theology, that among all the branches of learning cultivated among them there is none which occupies a smaller share of our time and attention.<sup>33</sup>

The universities did provide some means of religious growth for their students, according to Thirwall, but not the lectures and certainly not the chapel services, as Turton had stressed.

The means by which . . . their religious impressions are strengthened, their religious views enlightened and enlarged, are, in the first place, their private studies, for which our libraries, peculiarly rich in theological literature, supply them with all the aids they can desire; next, the social worship, not of our chapels, but of our churches; next, the intercourse, not with the governing part of the societies to which they belong, but with companions of congenial sentiments and pursuits.<sup>34</sup>

To Thirwall, it was obvious that, if a student wanted an opportunity for religious learning, he could find it at Cambridge, but largely through his own efforts.

But still you may observe that, according to this view the student in fact, as far as religion is concerned, educates himself: that the College, which we always love to consider as a family, does scarcely anything for him; and you may ask whether this ought to be the case, and whether at this rate we have any great advantage over the so-called London University, where though religion is excluded from its plan, its students may while pursuing their studies, be enjoying the best possible religious education. . . . That [the Cambridge colleges] in fact do at present, either contribute nothing to that end, or something so insignificant

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<sup>33</sup>Connop Thirwall, A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Turton, D.D., on the Admission of Dissenters to Academical Degrees (Cambridge: Pitt Press, 1834), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

as not to be worth taking into account, is the very point for which I am now contending.<sup>35</sup>

Thirwall came down very hard on the chapel services. The services were not, he contended a means of religious education at all. The elimination of compulsory chapel would be the only structural change needed in admitting Dissenters, and that would be no loss to the university.

My reason for thinking that our daily services might be omitted altogether, without any material detriment to religion, is simply that, as far as my means of observation extend, with an immense majority of our congregation it is not a religious service at all, and that to the remaining few it is the least impressive and edifying that can well be conceived. . . .

That the Dissenters would not be willing attendants at our daily service, I can easily believe: it is difficult enough already to find any persons who are. . . .

If one half at least of our present daily congregations was replaced by an equal number of Dissenters, they would not have come with greater reluctance, nor pay less attention to the words of the service, nor be less edified, or more delighted at its close.<sup>36</sup>

He proceeded to attack the theological lectures, claiming that they had no right to such a title.

They are not selected for the sake of the opportunities they may afford of teaching any peculiar principles of religion, but for the sake of communicating certain kinds of knowledge, which are not at all necessary to a Christian, but which, nevertheless, as a gentleman and a scholar, he ought not to be destitute.<sup>37</sup>

Reaction to Thirwall's pamphlet was mixed but heated. Fifteen fellows, tutors, and lecturers of Cambridge colleges issued a notice denying the correctness of Thirwall's remarks about the lectures. Upon sending a copy

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 20, 22, 34.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 18.



of his pamphlet to the Master of Trinity, Christopher Wordsworth,<sup>38</sup> Thirwall received the following letter.

I have read [your pamphlet] and, I am sorry to say, with extreme pain and regret. It appears to me of a character so out of harmony with the whole constitution and system of the college, that I find some difficulty in understanding how a person, with such sentiments, can reconcile it to himself to continue a member of a society founded and conducted on principles from which he differs so widely.

But however this may be, I consider it certain that entertaining, and having publicly avowed the opinions, and made the assertions, which you there have done in connection with several very important parts of our system. . . --opinions and assertions very erroneous, as I think, in themselves--and very unjust. . . ., you become, I must say, in my judgment, ipso facto disqualified from being in any degree actively concerned in the administration of our affairs; and I trust, therefore, you will feel no difficulty in resigning the appointment of assistant tutor. . . . Your continuing to retain it would, I am convinced, be very injurious to the good government, the reputation, and the prosperity of the college in general. . . ., and to the welfare of the young men, and of many others.<sup>39</sup>

Thirwall did resign his tutorship (Wordsworth could not require him to resign his fellowship), but only after protesting the injustice of it and receiving letters of support from the majority of fellows of Trinity. Wordsworth stressed that Thirwall was dismissed not because of the issue of Dissenters, but because he was wrong in criticizing so vehemently the chapel services of the college to which he owed his support. Nevertheless, the impact of the dispute between Thirwall and Wordsworth was to make the opening of the university to Nonconformists a question on which everyone in Cambridge had to take one side or the other.

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<sup>38</sup>Later Bishop of Lincoln.

<sup>39</sup>Connop Thirwall, Letters, Literary and Theological ed. J. J. Stewart Perowne and Louis Stokes (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1881), pp. 118-19.

This crisis let loose streams of arguments on either side, some of which were intemperate, to say the least. It was common for the admission of Nonconformists to be referred to as "opening the floodgates of infidelity." An article of 8 April 1834 in the Standard warned of what Cambridge would be like by 1900 if it were opened to Dissenters. Preaching would be forbidden. University lectures would not be allowed to contain any reference to doctrine. The names of colleges would be changed to avoid any breach of religious equality: Trinity would become "Unity," and Christ's would be "Hope Hall."<sup>40</sup> The fears of such conservatives were fed and their resistance strengthened by the vocal minority of Dissenters who were becoming increasingly bitter about their exclusion and whose bitterness was in turn increased by such exaggerated arguments.

On the liberal side, Thomas Arnold argued for the restructuring of the Establishment, so that a broad national church would include both Anglicans and Dissenters. This made others angry, among them J. H. Newman, who claimed that such latitudinarian attitudes "tended toward formal Socinianism."<sup>41</sup> R. W. Hampden, the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, rebutted Newman, drawing a distinction between religion, "the great facts of the Gospel binding on all Christians," and theology, which is subject to interpretation.<sup>42</sup> Further, it was often pointed out that subscription was only a barrier to those who were honest. There were many ways to get

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 2 vols., An Ecclesiastical History of England Series (London: Adam & Chas. Black, 1966), 1:91.

<sup>41</sup> John Henry Newman, Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman during his Life in the English Church, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 256.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Sir Charles Edward Mallet, A History of the University of Oxford, vol. 3, Modern Oxford (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 256.

around the religious tests. It would be far less of an evil influence at Oxford and Cambridge to have Dissenters there honestly.

Another important pamphleteer was Frederick Denison Maurice. He had studied at both Oxford and Cambridge and later was a founder of the Working Men's College in London. In 1835 he published Subscription No Bondage, in which he explained that oaths of subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles required upon matriculation at Oxford presented no hardship to Dissenters if understood properly. He posited that the best teachers were those who were bound by some fixed convictions. Those teachers who were not firm in their own beliefs were in fact more restrictive of their students' thinking. Hence it was good that teachers should believe in something--in this case the Thirty-nine Articles--and that students should understand their teachers' presuppositions. This did not mean that students were obliged to accept the teachers' beliefs. Rather, subscription provided liberty of thinking.

Subscription to Articles on entering Oxford was not intended as a test, but as a declaration of the terms on which the University proposed to teach its pupils, upon which terms they must agree to learn; it is fairer to express those terms than to conceal them; they are not terms which are to bind down the student to certain conclusions beyond which he cannot advance, but are helps to him in pursuing his studies, and warnings to him against hindrances and obstructions which past experience shows that he will encounter in pursuing them; they are not unfit introductions to a general education in humanity and in physics because they are theological, but on that account are valuable, because the superstitions which interfere with this education are associated with theology, and can only be cleared away by theology; the Articles if used for the purposes of study and not as terms of communion for Churchmen generally, which they are not and never can be, may contribute to the reconciliation of what was positive in all Christian sects.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Sir J. Frederick Maurice, Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, Chiefly Told in his own Letters, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), 1:181.

Maurice stressed the difference between Oxford, where students had to take an oath of subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, and Cambridge, where a student must declare himself a bona fide member of the Church of England. The Cambridge system, said Maurice, was much more distinctly exclusive than that of Oxford, because it involved a direct renunciation of Nonconformity.

Several years later, in Has the Church or the State the Power to Educate the Nation? he changed from his earlier position. He rejected even Oxford's requirement of subscription and argued against any Anglican control of the universities.

Now we have a multitude of sects, each assuming to itself the same magnificent name, or if it has not quite attained that arrogance of the mother sect, yet, considering itself the best existing part of the church, and bound, on certain grounds, to separate from the rest. Under such circumstances, what possible right can the state have to determine that one, and only one of them shall be its authorised teacher? Is not this a gross insult to the rest? But is it not more than an insult, an injury, to treat them as if they were not parts of the nation, to rob them of an Education which was meant for the whole of it? Suppose they have committed an offence against your dignity, what crime have they committed against the state, to deserve this exclusion? They pay their money to the state, they are willing, in all reasonable ways, to be its servants. And even supposing they were any of them bad or inefficient subjects, is that a reason for denying them the only chance of becoming better?<sup>44</sup>

The writers described above represented the full range of opinions on the subject of opening the universities. By the late 1830s, all of the major important arguments had been enunciated. The focus then shifted away from pamphleteering to political action.

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<sup>44</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, Has the Church, or the State the Power to Educate the Nation? (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1839), p. 157.

## CHAPTER II

It was against a background of exchanges of pamphlets and arguments that political action became involved in the issue of opening Oxford and Cambridge to Nonconformists. Dissenters in the early 1830s, particularly outside of London, were angry. Grievances seemed great in the light of reform being effected with regard to other elements in society. One incident that made Dissenters angry was a Grace brought to the Caput<sup>1</sup> at Cambridge in December, 1833. The Grace was brought by Professor Pryme for the appointment of an inquiry into the possibility of abolishing religious tests. The Grace was vetoed by the Vice-Chancellor, Joshua King, president of Queens College. By this action, King forced Dissenters to take more drastic action. There were cries for disestablishment. Meetings, some violent, took place in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, and other large provincial cities, to protest the university restrictions, as well as other disabilities.

The Dissenting leadership was more moderate. Nonconformists were hardly represented at all in the first reformed House of Commons. Thus their program had to be manageable and pragmatic. In March, 1833, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies<sup>2</sup> met in London to agree on a plan by which their most

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<sup>1</sup>The governing board at Cambridge. Its counterpart at Oxford was the Hebdomadal Board.

<sup>2</sup>Founded in the eighteenth century, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies were a loose organization, comprising two representatives from each Presbyterian, Independant, and Baptist congregation within twelve miles of London, whose purpose was the protection and extension of civil rights of Dissenters.

urgent grievances could be redressed. The Deputies drew up a public statement saying that they were ready for political action and listing six specific demands: exemption from tithes, exemption from poor rates, the right to marry without Anglican ceremonies, the right to bury dead in their own churchyards, legal birth registration, and admission to the universities.<sup>3</sup>

In March, 1834, Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, presented a petition to the House of Lords on behalf of 63 members of Cambridge University, in which they asked that Dissenters be relieved of one of their most serious grievances, the restriction on university degrees. The petitioners

are honestly attached to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England, as by law established; and are well persuaded of the great benefits it hath conferred, and is conferring, upon the kingdom at large. . . . Strongly impressed with this conviction, they would humbly submit to your hon. House their belief, as Protestant Christians, that no system of civil or ecclesiastical polity was ever so devised by the wisdom of man as not to require, from time to time, some modification from the change of external circumstances, or the progress of opinion. In conformity with these sentiments, they would further suggest to your hon. House, that no corporate body, like the University of Cambridge, can exist, in a free country, in honour or in safety, unless its benefits be communicated to all classes as widely as is compatible with the Christian principles of its foundation. . . . Among the changes which they think might be at once adopted with advantage and safety, they would suggest to your hon. House the expediency of abrogating, by legislative enactment, every religious test exacted from members of the University before they proceed to degrees. . . . Your petitioners conscientiously believe, that if the prayer of this petition be granted, the great advantage of good academic education might be extended to many excellent men who are now, for conscience sake, debarred from a full participation in them, though true friends of the institutions of the country; and your petitioners are convinced that this is the best way at once to promote the public good and to strengthen the foundations of the Civil and Ecclesiastical Establishments of this realm.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ecclestatic Review 5 (January 1839):1-3.

<sup>4</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, 22 (1834): 500-501.

In presenting the petition, Earl Grey spoke in favor of the request. He noted that Dissenters had always attended Cambridge; they simply could not take degrees. He asked the Lords to compare the experience of Cambridge with that of Oxford. The presence of Dissenters at Cambridge had not meant that that university offered a less satisfactory education than did Oxford.

Now I would ask, has any evil or any disadvantage whatever been experienced by the Church of England from the practice which prevails in the University of Cambridge? Far from it. I believe, that instances could be adduced where Dissenters who were educated at Cambridge have become members of the Established Church. Many of the Dissenters educated at Cambridge have evinced abilities of the highest order. . . . Is it fitting, after a residence of three years--after having received all the benefit of an enlightened education--that the Dissenter should be told, that he must stop short--that he should be deprived of that which was the object of his most anxious desire?<sup>5</sup>

Lord Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, concurred, doubting whether the universities could maintain their monopolistic system much longer.<sup>6</sup>

Spring Rice, the Secretary of the Treasury, presented the same petition to the House of Commons. The argument in the house concerned whether or not degrees were actually needed. It was suggested that being allowed to participate in studies at Cambridge was sufficient. Since 1616,

there was no bar whatever in the University of Cambridge to the Dissenters having every advantage which the education there could possibly confer on them--to their having access to every branch of knowledge, to their having their education superintended by the most distinguished characters which the country could afford. . . . The letters A.B. or M.D. add to their names comparatively little value. . . . They can have no reason to complain.<sup>7</sup>

The following month the Duke of Gloucester presented a petition to the Lords signed by 258 Members of the Cambridge Senate opposing the first

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., cols. 504-505.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., cols. 514-15.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., cols. 590-91.

petition. The argument given in this petition was not that Dissenters were not entitled to university degrees, but that it was impossible to admit them to the governance structure of the university. Degrees would mean that Nonconformists would be entitled to places in the Senate, which made and enforced all regulations for this Anglican university. The Lords evaded the issue by agreeing that no action needed to be taken on such a request until it came to them in the form of a bill.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, April, 1834, the Quarterly Journal of Education published a manifesto signed by over one hundred members of Oxford University and concurred with by nine hundred members of Convocation. It declared that admission of Dissenters would

violate our legal and prescriptive rights and subvert the system of religious instruction and discipline so long and so beneficially exercised by us. . . . The admission of persons who dissent from the Church of England would lead to the most disastrous consequences, that it would unsettle the minds of the younger members of the University, would raise up and continue a spirit of controversy, which is at present unknown, and would tend to reduce religion to an empty and unmeaning name or to supplant it by scepticism and infidelity.

Meanwhile debate continued in the House of Commons throughout the spring of 1834. Members were asked to recall the arguments raised during debates on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and on Catholic Emancipation.

[Has the] House been made the worse by the admission of Catholic Members? Certainly not, and that being so, the question is, would the University be made a whit the worse for the admission of Catholics and Dissenters than the House has been? . . . The petitioners only wish to participate in the benefits of the University as far as they are general, and do not

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., cols. 979-1008.

<sup>9</sup>Quarterly Journal of Education 8 (April 1834): 179.



wish to derive any advantage from them as far as they were intended to serve the purpose exclusively, of the Church of England.<sup>10</sup>

The House of Commons turned their attention to the meaning of the word national as some people were applying it to the universities. Sir Robert Inglis was M.P. for Oxford University and would be, in upcoming debates, one of the fiercest opponents of all bills dealing with university reform. He denied that Cambridge was in any real sense a national institution, insisting that the amount of money received by the university from the government was negligible, far less than that received by the Scottish universities, for example. The university was in fact dependent on Church of England funds for its existence. Further, there were those who would claim that the universities were founded before the Reformation--that they were originally not Anglican, but Roman Catholic, institutions, and at that time Catholic meant national. Inglis responded with figures showing that at Cambridge the majority of students attended, and fellowships were held in, colleges founded since the Reformation. Three-fourths of the property held by the university had come from Church of England sources.<sup>11</sup>

Inglis continued, enunciating one of the conservatives' basic principles in this issue. The term Dissent used correctly applied to non-Churchmen, that is, anyone who dissented from the Established Church. "A Dissenter is not merely an Independent or a Baptist. . . .: it must include the Roman Catholics . . . ; and every other form of worship; men of any creed or none."<sup>12</sup>

Lord John Russell countered, saying that honors and degrees bestowed by the universities were civil, not ecclesiastical, distinctions. The

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<sup>10</sup>Hansard 22 (1834): 628-29.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., cols. 674-84.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., col. 686.

purpose of a degree was to certify proficiency in arts, or law, or science, not in religious doctrine. The universities "have no more right to inquire into his religious opinions, under such circumstances, than they would to examine a person appointed to a Bishopric as to his medical or legal opinions."<sup>13</sup>

On 17 April 1834 Col. Williams, member for Lancashire, introduced a motion that an address be presented to the king requesting the admission of Dissenters to both universities. The address would petition the king to signify to Oxford and Cambridge his desire that the universities no longer act under the 1616 Edicts and Letters of James I, "by which he would have all that took any Degree in schools to subscribe to the three articles of the 36th Cannon," nor to require an oath of membership in the Church of England. The lifting of these restrictions would be applied to all students except those taking Divinity degrees.<sup>14</sup>

Before any discussion of the motion was allowed to take place, George Wood, one of the few Nonconformist M.P.s, proposed an amendment. He requested leave to bring in a bill "to grant to his Majesty's subjects generally the right of admission to the English Universities, and of equal eligibility to degrees therein, notwithstanding their diversities of religious opinion; degrees in divinity alone excepted." He suggested that the universities were indeed national institutions, and that this proposition was simple and unanswerable. Thus a bill passed by the legislature would be the correct means of proceeding.<sup>15</sup> Wood's amendment, as well as the original motion, came as a surprise to most of the liberal members of the House of Commons. They and their supporters at the universities were unhappy with the turn

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., col. 918.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., col. 900.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., col. 902.

of events. To effect any university reform, the backing of moderate Churchmen would be absolutely necessary. The identification of this movement with Dissent would undoubtedly alienate some important people. The bill would have much greater chance of success if it were introduced by an Anglican rather than a Dissenter.

The bill was brought in the following month by Wood. During the time the bill was under consideration, the House received over forty petitions. Mr. Estcourt, member for Oxford University, presented a petition signed by various members of the university, including students as well as the Chancellor, the masters, fellows, and professors. They protested any interference in the governance of their university. The proposed bill was infringing on their rights and had to be rejected if the union between Church and state were to be kept inviolate.<sup>16</sup> This petition was followed closely by one from the mayor and city of Oxford, seconding the fears of the university's petition.

It would be an infraction of the ancient rights of the Universities--an innovation of their discipline--would lead to schisms amongst the students--to the overthrow of those regulations which time had proved so essential to the promotion of learning, and the advancement of the great and solid interests of the country in Church and State--and eventually to the subversion of the Established religion.<sup>17</sup>

Still more petitions came from graduates of the universities and from parish ministers.

During the debate on the bill, the House was asked to note and take warning from the example of a secular university in the United States.

At Cambridge, four miles from Boston, is situated a college upon a large and liberal scale. . . . All students have equal rights. . . . This college is regarded by

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<sup>16</sup>Hansard 23 (1834): 779-80.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., col. 1030.

the orthodox party as heretical on religious subjects, it being observed as somewhat remarkable, that most of the theological students leave Cambridge disaffected to the doctrine of the Trinity. The advocates of this system, taking the alarm, have established an academy for the education of young men, who must be compelled to learn the doctrine of their fathers, as the effectual means to oppose the Cambridge heresies.

Did the members wish to see the English universities reduced to such a condition?<sup>18</sup>

The vote was taken on 28 July. Supporters of the bill included both members for the borough of Cambridge, Spring Rice and Professor George Pryme, in addition to Russell, Palmerston, and Daniel O'Connell. Gladstone opposed the bill. The vote was 164 to 75 in favor of opening the universities.

Oxford University Magazine carried the following report of the passage of the bill:

It carried by a large majority, in the midst of disgraceful uproar raised to drown remonstrance and surpass arguments which could not be answered, a bill to force upon the Universities persons of any, all, or no religious communion--a measure of Church and State, and which involved a violation of private rights and a tyrannical interference with private conscience to a degree unequalled except in the ultimate states of revolution.<sup>19</sup>

On 1 August, the bill reached the House of Lords for the vote. After many of the same arguments reviewed in the Commons, the bill was defeated by a large majority.

It is arguable that the 1834 bill, in spite of its failure, was useful to the Dissenters' cause. It brought the issue into the political arena and to the attention of many who had long ignored Dissenters' grievances.

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<sup>18</sup>Hansard 24 (1834): 678.

<sup>19</sup>Oxford University Magazine, March 1835, pp. 116-17. Quoted in S. J. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain, 3d ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), p. 434.

It was remarked more than once during the course of the debates that the number and frequency of petitions from Dissenters and their supporters made it clear that the universities could not retain their exclusive restrictions indefinitely. Pressure was increasing, and it would be difficult for the Established Church to retain its monopoly over higher education for very long.

But the positive by-products of the bill were offset by its pre-maturity, which had the effect of retarding the reform movement. The liberals were not well prepared for the battle; they were not unified in their attack. The major issue that emerged was not over the rights of Dissenters, but over the rights of the universities vis-à-vis outside, i.e., parliamentary interference. Supporters of religious tests became equated with the defense of the universities. Supporters of the liberal position had work to do in returning the attention of the political nation to the issue of religious toleration.

In a pamphlet published in 1835, Edward Denison, Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, summed up the major arguments as they stood after the defeat of the 1834 bill. The pamphlet was entitled A Review of the State of the Question Respecting the Admission of Dissenters to the Universities, and in it Denison ultimately came down on the side of the liberal position. He began by defining the issue:

Free admission to the national universities for all members of the nation; and a full participation in the education there given, and in the degrees which are the testimonials of proficiency, without the necessity for any declaration of religious opinions, or conformity to the religious observances of any particular sect.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Denison, A Review of the State of the Question Respecting the Admission of Dissenters to the Universities (London: John Cochran, 1835), pp. 5-6.

To Denison, it was a given assumption that opening the universities to as many people as possible was a good thing, but he saw four basic factors inhibiting the attainment of that goal. First, the universities had a right to expect that their charters, which limited membership to Anglicans, would not be interfered with. However, that could be refuted by acknowledging the superior right of Parliament and the crown to alter that which they had created. They had that right because the universities were national, public institutions. Second, the only way to enter either of the universities was through a college. The colleges were not national institutions, though, but private corporate bodies, and the state could not interfere with their internal arrangements. In answer to that assertion, even if the colleges were corporate entities, they were still the creation of the civil society, whose legislature could impose changes deemed necessary for the good of the larger society. The third barrier in the way of the admission of Dissenters was the possible effect that the presence of people of differing faiths would have on the universities. The validity of such fears could be countered by observing that Dissenters already attended Cambridge, with no ill results for the university. The last obstacle was the projected effect on society of granting to non-Churchmen the privileges in society associated with university degrees. The answer to that was that Dissenters already had political rights and privileges: they could and did sit in Parliament, for example. University degrees would simply mean that they would be that much better prepared for such positions. Having outlined all the important obstacles and then denying their logic, Denison concluded that there could be no reason for another university bill to fail.

However, the next political move directly concerned not Oxford and Cambridge, but the University of London. The establishment of an alternative university might have taken the pressure off the older universities to

admit Nonconformists and award them degrees. In fact exactly the opposite occurred.

The origins of the University of London went back to 1825. Thomas Campbell, after observing the universities of Bonn and Berlin, returned to England with the hope of creating a new English university based on the German model. In a letter of 9 February 1825 to the Times, he pleaded for creation of a "great London university" which would give an education to "the youth of our middling rich people."<sup>21</sup> The liberal peer, Lord Brougham, became interested in the idea, as an opportunity to provide Dissenters with a place to earn university degrees. Brougham invited representatives from all Dissenting bodies to meet and discuss the establishment of a University of London. Campbell wanted religion completely excluded from such a new university, fearing that otherwise it would become merely a Nonconformist university, rather than one for all elements in the population. In 1826, a joint stock company was formed to raise capital for the new London College. A governing Council, chaired by the Duke of Sussex, was formed. There were twenty-five members, most of whom were Benthamites. The Council decided that religion was important, but that it should be left out of the course of studies and up to "the natural guardians of the pupils."

In 1827, the cornerstone was laid for the university in Gower Street. Many of the university's originators had been educated in Scotland. The Scottish university system colored their ideas of how the University of London should operate; it was a non-residential institution, with moderate fees, so that large numbers of students from middle class families could attend. The establishment of the University of London signified a functioning alliance of all educationally dissatisfied elements in society--

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<sup>21</sup>Times (London), 9 February 1825.

Nonconformists, Roman Catholics, Jews, liberals, and all those who supported scientific and secular education.<sup>22</sup>

The struggle to obtain a charter began as soon as the new university was conceived. Brougham had tried to get a charter as early as 1825. His attempt and others in 1826, 1832, and 1834 failed. Much of the opposition came from within Oxford and Cambridge. Rather than wanting to provide a university for non-Churchmen, so that the agitation for admission to Oxford and Cambridge would be less severe, the Tory establishment at those institutions saw in the University of London a threat to its monopoly of higher education.

The arguments against the granting of a charter to London University provide more evidence of the conservatives' concept of university education. William Sewell's pamphlet, A Second Letter to a Dissenter on the Opposition of the University of Oxford to the Charter of the London College, contained the clearest statement of the conservative objections. Basic to Sewell's position was his belief that religion was the main element in human knowledge, not just one area of study among many of equal importance. As such, religion determined the course of instruction at any university. At the University of London,

they left out religion, because as a joint stock company of Socinians, and Quakers, and Unitarians, and Jews, with many other varieties of denominations, they could not of course decided upon any one form

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<sup>22</sup>King's College, London, was opened in October, 1831, as a counter-measure in the metropolis to the threat to the Church posed by London College. Religion was included in the course of study at King's College. It was "an essential part of the system to imbue the minds of youth with a knowledge of the doctrine and duties of Christianity as inculcated by the United Church of England and Ireland." The Duke of Wellington, quoted in John William Adamson, English Education, 1789-1902 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 90.



of instruction. This omission and acknowledgment, at once excluded the very notion of a place of education.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, the London institution had no claim to the term university. At the beginning, London College had professed to be only a place for "instructing," not "educating." That is, to Sewell, if London College had been simply a place for lectures, there would have been no offence, because mere lecturing could be done on secular topics without including religious principles. It could not be so with a university, whose responsibility it was to teach morality as well as to impart knowledge. When the new institution demanded a charter, it was claiming to educate.

Sewell declared it to be perfectly obvious that a secular institution could not function properly. Even Dissenters would agree to this. Dissenting parents would not want to send their children to "that godless institution in Gower Street" any more than Anglican parents would.

[Dissenters] are not cold, or careless, or indifferent. Their very interest in religion, however it may lead to errors, is the cause, and excuse of their dissent. Sir, will such men entrust their sons to the care of the London College? Will they be content with Philosophy, and Chemistry, and Botany, in the formation of those souls, the dearest to them on earth? Will they be satisfied with that moiety of education held out by the lectures in Gower-street?<sup>24</sup>

Sewell pointed out that most students at London were not Christian at all. "Are they not chiefly Socinians, . . . Unitarians; or, what is still worse, Modern Philosophers?"<sup>25</sup>

Any institution could give titles or degrees to be used within its own walls. But when the government issued a charter, Sewell said, it gave

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<sup>23</sup>William Sewell, A Second Letter to a Dissenter on the Opposition of the University of Oxford to the Charter of the London College (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1834), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

wider recognition to such degrees, admitting the recipients to places of high status in society. Those who would give a charter to the University of London

must prepare, with this concession, to give Dissenters entrance into the very strongholds of the Church and the Country. . . . If the State chooses to declare that it does not desire itself, nor will permit its subordinate societies to demand, a certificate of religious education, conducted upon old principles of learning, as a condition for its honours and trusts, by far the most simple plan would be at once to remove from all the statutes and bye-laws of the realm all distinctive privileges of the kind. Let there be no Bachelors, no Masters, no Doctors. Or rather let us rejoice in the arrival of the day, when we all alike are Masters, and all Doctors--when the schoolmaster has brought the whole nation to such an effulgency of enlightenment, that all shades and gradations of learning are lost in one blaze of wisdom. But if it still connects with these titles any posts which are marks of its favour, still more which command the Church, is there not something like treachery in giving the pass-word to Dissenters, or rather something like an open announcement that Churchman or Dissenter is all alike?<sup>26</sup>

If, simply because of their numbers, Dissenters must have a charter, Sewell concluded, one should be given to each Dissenting body separately. Only this way could any institution base its instruction on a coherent body of belief. "There is a gap--rather a wide gap--between a religious body, associated in the principles of religion, and a body banded together upon the very condition of its exclusion." But,

in this case I see no reason why a charter should not be conferred upon a College of Jews. The Unitarians should certainly have one. . . . Deliver out other Charters of Atheism, or Fatalism, or Chance, to every house or individual in the district. I can see no other end but this, involved in the concession of a Charter to the London College.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-51.

Finally, Sewell admitted that Oxford and Cambridge saw London as a threat. The older universities' interest were those of "dignity and reputation, which demand a monopoly of honour."<sup>28</sup>

Insofar as Sewell spoke for the entire conservative position, his arguments in his Second Letter made very clear two important points about the admission of Dissenters to Oxford and Cambridge. First, the major issue was not the effect Nonconformists would have within those universities. Obviously, that could not be a great fear because of the presence of Nonconformists at Cambridge already. Rather, the greater concern was for society as a whole, because of the fact that Dissenters with degrees would be entitled to positions of leadership. Thus, the question was not whether they should attend and receive degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, but whether they should receive university degrees at all. Second, the fear of Dissent might have been overcome if the issue had not included fear of atheism as well. Opening the universities to Nonconformists could not be done without opening them to all persons, even those of no religious faith. Nineteenth-century Britain may not have been a church-going society, but neither was it a secular society. It would have been a huge step to acknowledge the non-Christian elements in it.

After more than a decade of debate, the University of London did receive a charter in 1837.<sup>29</sup> Sewell had been partially correct in predicting that the University of London would not attract a great number of devout Dissenters. Though the university thrived, it did not preclude Dissenters from wanting to attend Oxford and Cambridge. This was not because of the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>The original University of London, or London College, became legally University College. The charter for the University of London included both University College and King's College.

secularism at London, though, but rather because of Oxford and Cambridge's prestige. Sewell himself had said, "It is our antiquity they want."<sup>30</sup>

The greatest effect that the University of London had on the question of Dissenters at Oxford and Cambridge was in breaking down the generally held principle that religion was an essential part of education. The fact that the University of London was secular shocked many people. But the university's Council included some very prestigious members; it had to be taken seriously. In proving that a university could function with less emphasis on religion, the existence of the University of London increased, rather than decreased, the pressure on Oxford and Cambridge to admit Dissenters. On balance, that effect was greater than providing an alternative outlet for such pressure.

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<sup>30</sup>Sewell, Second Letter, p. 31.

### CHAPTER III

During the late 1830s and the 1840s, several forces within the universities were influencing the status of the issue of Dissenters at Oxford and Cambridge. The first of these existed only at Oxford and was one more reason that reform came with more difficulty there than at Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Among the leaders of the resistance to change at Oxford were the Tractarians. The members of the Oxford Movement were not normally supporters of vested traditional interests, but with regard to higher education it was necessary for them to support the Tory position. Newman and his followers saw the attempts at secularizing the universities, particularly Oxford, as part of a larger, more general secularizing trend, which they feared. The Tractarians did want to effect some reforms at Oxford, but their plans did not include Nonconformists. Nonconformists were diametrically opposed to the Oxford Movement theologically. The Tractarian leadership wanted a reformed Oxford to be the center of the revival of the Church, a Church which would be moving away from Protestant Dissent doctrinally and towards Catholicism. In Apologia pro Vita Sua, Newman admitted that

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<sup>1</sup>The traditionally more conservative atmosphere at Oxford has already been mentioned. The progress of science was another influence. Although Oxford built laboratories earlier, they became obsolescent and were never updated. Cambridge became more involved with science, as evidenced by such men as Priestley (a Dissenter), whose name is associated with that university. As science grew, Cambridge was quicker to adopt new teaching methods in addition to new areas of subject matter. In short, Cambridge in the 1830s was further on the way to becoming a modern university.

that the Oxford Movement became organized partly as a defensive reaction against liberal movements at Oxford.<sup>2</sup>

Newman's conservatism in education was based on his concept of the purpose of a university. In The Idea of a University, he echoed Sewell in limiting the major function of a university to that of teaching Christian morality. Newman, though, made more specific the distinction between a teaching institution--a university--and a place for the extension of knowledge--an academy.

[A university] is a place of teaching universal knowledge. This implies that its object is . . . the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophic discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science.

Such is a University in its essence, and independently of its relation to the Church. But, practically speaking, it cannot fulfill its object duly, such as I have described it, without the Church's assistance; or, to use the theological term, the Church is necessary for its integrity. Not that its main characters are changed by this incorporation; it still has the office of intellectual education; but the Church steadies it in the performance of that office.<sup>3</sup>

The Anglican system should not and did not exclude science and discovery, according to Newman. There were academies and societies for such purposes.<sup>4</sup> But these activities did not belong within a university. "To discover and teach are distinct functions."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John Henry Newman, Apologia pro Vita Sua (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), pp. 317-18.

<sup>3</sup>John Henry Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), Preface, ix.

<sup>4</sup>He cited the Royal Society, Ashmolean and Architectural Societies, British Association, Antiquarian Society, and Royal Academy for the Fine Arts as examples.

<sup>5</sup>Newman, The Idea of a University, Preface, xiii.

Newman developed his argument, saying that knowledge is not an end for its own sake.

Just as a commander wishes to have tall and well-formed and vigorous soldiers, not from any abstract devotion to the military standard of height or age, but for the purposes of war, and no one thinks it any thing but natural and praiseworthy in him to be contemplating, not abstract qualities, but living and breathing men; so, in like manner, when the Church founds a University, she is not cherishing talent, genius, or knowledge, for their own sake, but for the sake of her children, with a view to their spiritual welfare and their religious influence and usefulness, with the object of training them to fill their respective posts in life better, and of making them more intelligent, capable, active members of society.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, he said, a secular "university" cannot exist. The very name indicates the teaching of universal knowledge. To Newman, it was obvious that religion is part of all branches of knowledge and cannot be excluded from any university's courses.<sup>7</sup>

Newman's arguments and those of his followers had considerable influence in Oxford. Because of the existence of the Oxford Movement, liberalism was retarded. Newman's secession to Rome in 1845 was essentially a concession of defeat, after which reform could begin. Newman admitted as much in his Apologia: "I find no fault with the liberals, they had beaten me in a fair field."<sup>8</sup> Mark Pattison agreed, saying that when the Tractarians

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., xii.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20. This argument is very similar to Sewell's and may have been based on it. Thirwall, in his Letter to the Rev. Thomas Turton, denied the etymology and the resulting reasoning that a university must teach all knowledge in order to deserve the title. "Everybody at all acquainted with the history of universities, knows that the term originally referred, not to the studies, but to the students. Thus the law school at Bologna was the sole university of that place [because its students came from diverse parts of the Continent]. . . . I should not be surprised if some of the logicians of Gower Street were to attempt to make out, that neither Oxford nor Cambridge is entitled to the name of an University, as Mr. Sewell understands it." (p. 15).

<sup>8</sup>Newman, Apologia, p. 237.

left Oxford, it was a

deliverance from the nightmare which oppressed Oxford for fifteen years. . . . [They had] entirely diverted our thoughts from the true business of the place and reduced scholarship to a low level. By the secessions of 1845 this was extinguished in a moment, and from that moment dates the regeneration of the university. . . . The liberal reaction must have come.<sup>9</sup>

A second internal factor existed at both universities. It was the emergence of a generation of young, liberal fellows and tutors who saw the need for reform from within the universities. These men rose to influence in the universities as Tractarianism declined. Unlike earlier reformers, though, they realized that the universities could not do everything by themselves. Given the strong clerical ties and the structure of the universities, there could be reform only to a limited extent until outside forces stepped in. These men did not view the universities as private entities, independent of parliamentary control. Rather, they recognized both the right of Parliament to legislate for the universities and the need for such external action.

One such man was Arthur P. Stanley.<sup>10</sup> He studied at Balliol and was a Fellow of University College. Stanley was a leader in the agitation for academic reforms. He cared very much about upholding the traditions of Oxford, but he believed that preserving the past did not preclude Oxford from moving forward. Although he took orders himself, he thought clerical control of the universities was what kept them from providing the highest level of scholarship.

Benjamin Jowett worked closely with Stanley and was drawn by him into the reform movement. Jowett was a Fellow and later Master of Balliol.

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<sup>9</sup>Mark Pattison, Memoirs (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885), pp. 236-37, 239.

<sup>10</sup>Stanley had been Thomas Arnold's student at Rugby and is best known as Arnold's biographer. He was later Dean of Westminster.



He was known at Oxford as an excellent teacher. Though he was not widely recognized as a scholar himself, he was acutely aware of the need for high quality scholarship at Oxford.

Mark Pattison was another of the "new" liberals at Oxford. He was a Fellow and Rector of Lincoln College. Once a follower of Newman (though never in the mainstream of the Oxford Movement), Pattison reversed himself after 1845 and moved to the front of the reform movement. In his sermons and writings, he was among the most vocal in demanding an end to the inefficiencies and inequities in the system at Oxford. He was successful in instituting reforms at Lincoln, and its academic reputation rose to the top among the Oxford colleges because of his work.

No individual names stand out so clearly at Cambridge as those of Stanley, Pattison, and Jowett at Oxford. But at Cambridge, too, there was a growing group of liberals whose influence grew after the failure of the 1834 bill. At both Oxford and Cambridge the people who wanted to see the end of the Anglican domination were the same ones who wanted academic reforms. They believed that the first duty of a university was scholarship rather than teaching. Hence, they thought control of the universities should not be in clerical hands, but in the hands of a learned professoriate. Admission of non-Churchmen was implicit in their reasoning. If the purpose of the university was not the imparting of Christian knowledge, but rather the extension of all knowledge, there could be no reason to limit admission to members of the Established Church. Further, if scholarship rather than teaching was important, the university should be strengthened in relation to the colleges, and major decision-making should take place at the university rather than the college level. If the structure were as it should have been, the colleges could no longer resist the admission of Dissenters.



While these liberal leaders were emerging, the political situation was also changing. The formation of a Conservative Government in November, 1834, made Dissenters nervous. However, they were in a good position to demand that their grievances be righted. Peel's government was in office by only a small margin and could not afford to alienate the Dissenting voters, who were just learning to use their new political leverage. Many of the efforts of Peel's first ministry were directed towards resolving conflict with Nonconformity: evidence is seen in the Tamworth Manifesto, where Peel made clear his conciliatory intentions, as well as in a tithes bill and a Dissenters' Marriage Bill.<sup>11</sup>

In 1835 the Whigs returned to office under Lord Melbourne. Dissenters' hopes were raised once again, but the alliance between Dissent and the Whig Party was not constant. Anger and fear caused by the Conservative victory in 1834 had made many Dissenters take extreme positions. A large portion of Nonconformists were irreconcilable to working within the system, even after the Whigs were back in office. Dissent was losing what political influence it had because of the extreme positions that some of its members were taking, including relatively vocal support for disestablishment. Nonconformists themselves were divided and thus weakened as the range of Nonconformist political opinions widened. Peel returned to office in 1841, but took no concrete action on Nonconformists' behalf as he had done in his first ministry. This increased the fragmentation, so that when Lord John Russell's government was formed in 1846, Dissenters were still at a political disadvantage.

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<sup>11</sup>Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 69-70. In the Tamworth Manifesto, Peel denied that Dissenters had an inherent right to attend the universities, but he did ask the Duke of Wellington, the Vice-Chancellor, to try to end required subscription at Oxford. Wellington refused.

The 1847 election for M.P. for Oxford University directly influenced the direction that the reform movement would take there. Three candidates were presented. Edward Cardwell was a moderate conservative who was open to reform and had the support of the Hebdomadal Board. C. G. Round was an arch-conservative whose support came from the Tory establishment within the colleges. The third candidate was William E. Gladstone. He was feared by some as a possible reformer, but managed to coalesce the support of differing elements. The Oxford Movement backed him because he had had sympathies with their religious position. But he was also attractive to many of the younger, liberal scholars, including Stanley and Jowett. In the end, Cardwell withdrew, and Gladstone defeated Round, 997 votes to 824.

By the late 1840s there were many people who realized that university reform could only come through outside intervention. Jowett voiced such feelings in an 1848 letter to the liberal M.P. Roundell Palmer,<sup>12</sup> when he said, "It is nobody's fault--we cannot reform ourselves."<sup>13</sup> Through the influence of such people, the demand was raised for a commission of inquiry into conditions at the universities. Indeed, such a request was not new. As early as 1831, the Westminster Review recommended that a commission be appointed so that control of the universities could be given to laymen and "these fair domains might be rescued from the sway of ecclesiastics."<sup>14</sup> In 1832, George Pryme, a Cambridge professor and M.P. for the borough of Cambridge, presented a petition for the formation of a commission. That petition was withdrawn. In 1837 the Earl of Radnor in the House of Lords and Pryme again in the House of Commons moved the appointment of a commission. The motion was again withdrawn. In 1844 a similar petition was introduced

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<sup>12</sup> Later Lord Selborne.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Faber, Jowett (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1957), p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Westminster Review 15 (July 1831): 59.

by W. D. Christie, M. P. for Weymouth. Christie had long championed the Dissenting cause, with regard to the universities question, including the University of London charter, as well as other Dissenting grievances. His petition was rejected in the House of Commons. In April of 1845, he was joined by Thomas Wyse and Joseph Hume in reintroducing his petition. In this latter attempt he was in constant correspondence with Stanley and Jowett. The petition was again defeated, 143 votes to 82. In each case, the debates show that the appointment of a commission was either withdrawn or defeated in the belief that the universities would reform themselves, and indeed that they were already doing so.

By 1847, it was apparent that the universities were not reforming themselves. The fear was growing on the part of liberals within the universities that the inevitable reform would come at the hands of enemies of the universities. In November of 1847, Jowett wrote to Roundell Palmer urging him to introduce a reform measure in Parliament, so that it would not be introduced by someone whose reforms would be more extreme, or by a Dissenter, which would be detrimental to the cause.

Is it at all probable that we shall be allowed to remain as we are for twenty years longer, the one solitary, exclusive unnational Corporation--our enormous wealth without any manifest utilitarian purpose; a place, the studies of which belong to the past, and unfortunately seem to have no power of incorporating new branches of knowledge; so exclusive, that it is scarcely capable of opening to the wants of the Church itself; and again, there mere funds of which considered as a trust fund can by no means be said to have been administered with strict conscientiousness for the promotion of "virtue and good learning?"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, M.A., Master of Balliol College, Oxford, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1897), 1:190.

Palmer did not introduce such a measure, and one of Jowett's fears was fulfilled. In April, 1850, a commission was proposed by James Heywood, M.P. for North Lancashire. Heywood had studied at Cambridge, but did not receive a degree because he was Unitarian. The commission was to operate "with a view to assist in the adaptation of the important institutions to the requirements of modern times."<sup>16</sup> Such wording immediately put conservatives on the defensive. This proposal was rejected in the House of Commons over the recommendation of Prime Minister Lord John Russell. One of the strongest opponents was the new M.P. for Oxford University, Gladstone. Lord John appealed directly to the Vice-Chancellors, Prince Albert at Cambridge and the Duke of Wellington at Oxford. The response from the universities was once again that they were reforming from within. When this direct attempt was frustrated, Lord John, in a surprise move, announced his government's intention of forming a commission over the parliamentary objection.

The commissions were formed in August and began their work in October. In the case of both Oxford and Cambridge, highly competent men were chosen. But they were all known as liberals, which frightened many people within the universities. The Cambridge commission was chaired by John Graham, Bishop of Chester. Its members included two scientists, John Herschel and Adam Sedgwick, the latter of whom was an ardent reformer. Other members were George Peacock, John Romilly, the attorney-general, and W. H. Bateson, who served as secretary. The Oxford commission was also "notoriously liberal in politics": the chair, A. C. Tait,<sup>17</sup> had been Stanley's tutor and mentor;

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<sup>16</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d series, 110 (1850): 697.

<sup>17</sup>Tait, Fellow of Balliol and Dean of Carlisle, later succeeded Arnold as Headmaster of Rugby. Later still he was Bishop of Lincoln and then Archbishop of Canterbury.

Francis Jeune<sup>18</sup> and H. G. Liddell<sup>19</sup> were known as radicals; J. L. Dampier and H. S. Johnson<sup>20</sup> were more moderate liberals; Professor Baden Powell had already published his demand for reform in the liberal Quarterly Journal of Education; Stanley was secretary of the commission. In a letter to Lord John Russell accepting his appointment, Tait expressed the general tone of both commissions.

The deep attachment which I feel to the University of Oxford will make me most anxious to fulfill zealously and to the utmost of my ability any of the duties that may be assigned to me. . . . The best friends of Oxford ought to feel deeply indebted to your Lordship for having undertaken and persevered in the appointment of this Commission; and by belief that, notwithstanding the present symptoms of opposition, the wisdom of the course adopted, as conducive to the best interests of the Universities, will in time be acknowledged by all who are anxious for their welfare.<sup>21</sup>

Protest over the appointment of the commissions was immediate and vehement. There was widespread resentment at the government's presuming to dictate to the universities. The Prime Minister and the commissions wrote the Vice-Chancellors asking for their cooperation. Lord John explained that the charge to commissions was to go no further than inquiry. He suggested that reform was inevitable and that everyone within the universities was aware of that. The commissions would simply make the changes come more easily and rationally, by making a thorough investigation.

Prince Albert replied for Cambridge. The commission was unconstitutional "and of a kind that was never issued except in the worst time." Therefore, it was his "public duty to decline answering any of the questions"

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<sup>18</sup>Master of Pembroke.

<sup>19</sup>Dean of Christ Church.

<sup>20</sup>Dean of Wells.

<sup>21</sup>Archibald Campbell Tait, Memoirs of a Victorian Dean (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 322.

sent him.<sup>22</sup> The Duke of Wellington was equally adamant.

We are of the opinion that the Commission is not constitutional, or legal, or such as the University or its members are bound to obey; and that the Commission cannot be supported by any authority of the Crown, either as Visitor, or under any prerogative or other right.<sup>23</sup>

The Hebdomadal Board at Oxford petitioned the Queen in Council to recall the commissions. She responded by calling in the Law Officers of the Crown, who said that the commissions were "not in any respect illegal or unconstitutional."<sup>24</sup> The question was directed to Convocation, where the vote was 249 to 105 that the commissions were indeed illegal and "improvidently issued" and that it was likely to "impede the course of improvement, and to destroy that confidence and stability which are essential for the well-being of an institution. . . . We crave peace and you give us chaos."<sup>25</sup>

Protest was still strong in Parliament, led by the two members for Oxford University, Gladstone and Inglis. There were two issues: the independence of the universities and the constitutionality of the government's action in appointing the commissions without parliamentary approval. Gladstone spoke to both issues:

The habit of self-government is essential to the real health and prosperity of these institutions. . . . To interfere with the universities is a matter most serious at all times. . . . But when a case for interference

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<sup>22</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers (Commons), 1852-53, vol. 49, Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State, Discipline, Studies, and Revenue of the University and Colleges of Cambridge, Correspondence, 2.

<sup>23</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers (Commons), 1852, vol.22, Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State, Discipline, Studies, and Revenue of the University and Colleges of Oxford, Appendix B, 21.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., Appendix B, 25.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Appendix B, 32, 35.

arises, the case must be a grave one resting on broad and intelligible grounds: and then the only proper way in which you can use these grounds is by applying to Parliament for powers of inquiry. . . . I do oppose this Commission, mainly on the ground of the fears I entertain of the immediate consequences that may result to the universities. As a precedent that would be acted upon in a different spirit, and in worse times, I have a great dread of this Commission, even for the universities alone. But I mainly object to it from the unconstitutional character which appears to me to attach to the proceeding.<sup>26</sup>

Lawyers for the universities purported to settle the question. Their decision was that the commissions were illegal, and the lawyers advised the universities and colleges not to give any assistance if the commissions insisted on continuing their work. Pattison described it:

The Heads of Houses, who knew their authority threatened, took the trouble to take counsel's opinion as to the legality of the Commission, and of course got the decision they wished. They got it by a quasi sanction for withholding documents, and for other mutinous conduct, which was only vexatious, as the Commission had no difficulty in obtaining in other ways all the information they required.<sup>27</sup>

The Privy Council responded in July with an Order in Council advising the Queen to continue with the commissions. Tait agreed, saying that the legal opinion did not really change anything.

It will be found that the much-vaunted opinion leaves the Commission where it found it. The Hebdomadal Board has now, as it has had all along, only point to settle, namely, "Does it choose to answer the questions of the Commissioners, though not compelled to do so? Will it act in the conciliatory spirit . . . or resist? Will the Board assist a friendly Royal Commission, or will it, by throwing impediments in the way, do what it can to ensure the appointment of an unfriendly Parliamentary Commission, whose powers will be compulsory?" The Commission itself is very little interested (except for the regard which its members entertain for the

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<sup>26</sup>Hansard 112 (1850): 1499.

<sup>27</sup>Pattison, Memoirs, p. 255.



University) in the way in which the Board settles this question. Nay, we should not be surprised if the Report appears before the Hebdomadal Board can make up its mind.<sup>28</sup>

The commissions proceeded with their work, but greatly handicapped. They had no authority to investigate finances. The governing authorities of the universities refused to supply any information. Some colleges gave some help, many gave none, but a few were supportive of the commissions (Jesus at Cambridge and Corpus Christi, All Souls, and St. John's at Oxford). The work of the commissions was carried on with the assistance of many individuals who supplied information to replace that refused by institutional sources. Many of the university professors had long been favor of reform but had no power to do anything. The younger tutors also welcomed the commission. Tait realized that it was more important to have the support of these people, as he wrote to Lord John Russell.

I fear it is hopeless to expect to secure anything like a cordial reception for the Commission from the Heads of Houses, but I shall be very much surprised if we are not welcomed by those who have much more real influence in Oxford than they; I mean the most active and intelligent of the College Tutors.<sup>29</sup>

The atmosphere created was one of division within the universities, as Pattison recalled in his memoirs. The Commission "was embraced with enthusiasm by the younger section of us, and received with sulky terror and bitter mortification by the Tories who banded together for one last desperate stand."<sup>30</sup>

The commissions issued their reports in 1852. The night before the Oxford report was to be presented (21 May), Stanley wrote to Jowett:

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<sup>28</sup>Tait, Memoirs, p. 162.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>30</sup>Pattison, Memoirs, p. 255.

The report will explode, I presume, tomorrow in Oxford, when you will receive your copies.

When you consider the den of lions through which the raw material had to be dragged, much will be excused. In fact, the great work was to finish it at all. There is a harsh, unfriendly tone about the whole which ought, under better circumstances, to have been avoided, but which may, perhaps, have the advantage of propitiating the Radicals.<sup>31</sup>

Stanley was not the only one who feared the results of the report. Dr. Moberly, Headmaster of Winchester and generally considered broad-minded, wrote in his journal, "The Oxford Commission Report is out: sweeping confusion and revolution are what it means."<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the reports were not at all radical. The Cambridge commission commended that university for the changes it was already in the process of effecting. The Oxford report, though a superior piece of work, was much more critical. Both commissions recommended educational reforms: that the colleges provide some financial support to the universities, that poor students be allowed to live in lodgings outside the colleges, that the curriculum be broadened, that the quality of teaching be raised, and that the Hebdomadal Board and the Caput be kept in closer contact with the teaching bodies. In some areas, the commission favored the status quo. In particular, they thought the college system provided the best education.

The issue of the removal of religious tests was not directly dealt with by the commissions. Lord John Russell had promised that the question of Dissenters would be outside the scope of the commissions' work. They did express disapproval of subscription in principle, though. The Cambridge report said that the university

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<sup>31</sup>Prothero, Rowland E., The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D. (London: John Murray, 1893), p. 432.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1936), p. 320.

should throw open the advantages of its system . . . as widely as the State has thrown open the avenues to civil rights and honours. . . . The internal system of collegiate discipline and the course of academical administration could be so adjusted as to comprehend persons of different religious opinions, without the neglect of religious ordinances, the compromise of religious consistency, or the destruction of religious peace.<sup>33</sup>

The commissions were important in the question of Nonconformists for several reasons apart from the opinions expressed on that subject directly. First, the commissions were responsible for recommending educational reforms that were ultimately implemented. In doing so, they strengthened the liberal position at the universities. At Cambridge, an older Revising Syndicate was revived to bring the university into accordance with the commission's major recommendations; the machinery for reform was thus in existence. At Oxford, Pattison later wrote of the commission as "a quiet revolution" which eventually brought "more improvement in the temper and teaching of Oxford than in the three centuries which went before it."<sup>34</sup> Both commissions expressed the belief that the universities were places both for teaching and for the advancement of knowledge. The reports suggested that professors be freed from elementary teaching so as to have more time to cultivate learning. In thus suggesting a change in the concept of the very purpose of the universities, the commissions were instrumental in breaking down one of the most basic tenets of the conservative argument against Dissenters.

Another effect of the commissions was on the position of William Gladstone. He considered the Oxford report an "able production." Some of the proposed changes were too sweeping for him, but the important thing

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<sup>33</sup>Cambridge Commission Report, 44.

<sup>34</sup>Mark Pattison, Suggestions on Academical Organisation, with Especial Reference to Oxford (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), p. 10.

was that he became acutely aware of the need for reform. He urged the universities to take this opportunity to reform from within. Sir George Lewis remarked of Gladstone the following year:

Gladstone's connection with Oxford is now exercising a singular influence upon the politics of the university. Most of his high-church supporters stick to him, and (insomuch as it is difficult to struggle against the current) he is liberalising them, instead of their torifying him. He is giving them a push forwards instead of their giving him a pull backwards.<sup>35</sup>

A third important effect of the commissions was that, in appointing them, especially over the objections within the universities, Lord John Russell proved that Oxford and Cambridge were subject to parliamentary control. He settled the question of the independence of the universities. The Oxford report expressed it explicitly. "Such an institution cannot be regarded as a mere aggregation of private interests; it is eminently national."<sup>36</sup> Another part of the conservative reasoning was eliminated.

The commission reports spurred Dissenters and their liberal supporters to renew the fight for admission. In March of 1854, a committee of M.P.s favoring religious liberty was organized. That committee submitted a petition with eighty-six signatures asking that Oxford and Cambridge be opened to non-Churchmen. The following May, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies petitioned that

these ancient institutions should be made conformable to their original intention as public schools for the instruction of the nation and also that they should be brought into accordance with the requirements of the present age.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Sir George Lewis, Letters, p. 261. Quoted in John Morley, Life of Gladstone, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1903), 2:499.

<sup>36</sup>Oxford Commission Report, 3.

<sup>37</sup>Bernard Lord Manning, The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 373.

In the meantime, Lord John Russell had left office, and after a brief ministry under Lord Derby, a coalition was formed under Lord Aberdeen in December, 1852. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had a strong voice in the government.

It became apparent, both from the incoming petitions and from expressions within the universities, that a bill would have to be drafted to follow up on the commissions' recommendations. As the Oxford commissioners had been more critical of that institution, it was dealt with first. Gladstone, as representative of the university within the government, was assigned to prepare a reform measure. He began the project with great enthusiasm. "My whole heart is in the Oxford bill," he said.<sup>38</sup>

The bill that Gladstone produced incorporated many of the elements in the commission report, but did not follow it exactly. The bill provided for a more representative Hebdomadal Council, the right of students to attend the university without being attached to any particular college, more equitable and efficient means of electing fellows and tutors, and an expanded professoriate. Jowett submitted an alternative plan, suggesting that Parliament need only legislate the basics and could leave the details to the university to determine. But by this time, Gladstone had taken the more extreme position and insisted on including all specifics in the bill. He did not, though, want to complicate the major educational reforms by including the removal of religious tests in this bill, even though he had by this time come to sympathize with the Dissenters' cause. Lord John Russell and Stanley supported Gladstone in thinking that the religious issue should be considered separately.

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<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Morley, 2:500. It is likely that he put so much energy into the bill because it was a distracting relief from the headaches of the Crimean War. Lord John Russell said, "My mind is exclusively occupied with the war . . . and yours with university reform."

Gladstone introduced his bill in March, 1854, telling his Oxford constituents that reform must come immediately. If his bill were to be thrown out, "no other half so favorable would ever again be brought in."<sup>39</sup> There were both positive and negative reactions to the bill. Bright, a Nonconformist M.P. was angry and announced that he did not care whether it passed or not. Without including the lifting of religious restrictions, the bill was a "pusillanimous and tinkering affair." Dissenters were always expected to manifest too much of the qualities spoken of in Corinthians: "To hope all things, to believe all things, and to endure all things."<sup>40</sup>

At the report stage of the bill, a clause was introduced by the Nonconformist James Heywood which would have lifted all religious restrictions--on matriculation, for degrees, for votes in Convocation, and for fellowships. This amendment was carried against the government by a majority of 91. Gladstone was angry. He wrote to Jowett:

Various causes, among which stand most predominantly forward the strength of private interests, the infusion of religious jealousies into our debates, the indifference of most of the Dissenters to the mere improvement of the University, and the actual opposition offered by the London portion of the Oxford Reformers, have given obstruction . . . to passing the Bill.<sup>41</sup>

Gladstone was forced to counter with a compromise.

This vote, however, made it a duty to reconsider our position with reference to the interests of the University . . . . We thought it better to acquiesce in Heywood's motion . . . than to divide against it, with the prospect, most probably, of being defeated, but even if we won, of leaving the question still open to prolonged and angry agitation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Morley, 2:504.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:505.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Vivian H. H. Green, A History of Oxford University (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1974), p. 148.

<sup>42</sup>William E. Gladstone, Correspondence on Church and Religion, ed. D. C. Lathburg, 2 vols. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1910), 2:217-18. The letter was addressed to the Rev. A. W. Hadden.

The tests would be abolished for admission and Bachelor's degrees but would be retained for higher degrees and honors. The compromise was accepted 205 to 196. In a letter to Frederick Meyrick, Prebendary of Lincoln, Gladstone wrote

I am deliberately of opinion that Oxford has come off more cheaply with Mr. Heywood's clauses from a most embarrassed question than it could have done had the contest been prolonged.<sup>43</sup>

Having reconciled himself to including the admission of Dissenters in the bill, he tried to reconcile the university, writing that it might prove to be beneficial.

If the Church of England has not strength enough to keep upright, that will soon appear in the troubles of emancipated Oxford: if she has, it will come out to the joy of us all in the immensely<sup>44</sup> augmented energy and power of the university for good.

Gladstone made it clear that it was the Church that would be on trial, not the university.

The amended bill was passed overwhelmingly in the House of Commons-- 223 votes to 79. It went through the House of Lords just as easily. Reaction was of course mixed. Stanley was delighted.

To see our labours of 1851-2 brought at last to bear on the point, to hear proclaimed on the housetop what we had announced in sheepskins and goatskins, to behold one's old enemies slaughtered before one's face with the most irresistible weapons, was quite intoxicating.<sup>45</sup>

Pattison was less enthusiastic. Though he supported Dissenters' claims, he disliked the way in which they had been met.

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<sup>43</sup>Frederick Meyrick, Memoirs of Life at Oxford and Experiences in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Germany, Spain and Elsewhere (London; John Murray, 1905), p. 166.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Morley, 2:504.

<sup>45</sup>Prothero, p. 434.

<sup>46</sup>Pattison, Suggestions, p. 6.

The intervention of the Legislature in 1854 was made by it, and submitted to us, in an unhappy spirit, which in a great degree, falsified the relation between the parties. After two centuries of neglect, the House of Commons had been brought to the point of considering the state of the universities. The movement was by no means a spontaneous one of the part of the House of the Government. They were brought to it, reluctantly enough, by the patient persevering effort of a minority of university men. Their reluctance to touch the case was intelligible, for it had all the characteristics which make a business distasteful to members of Parliament. It was wrapt up in new, intricate esoteric details, requiring much study to master; it related to the transcendental parts of education; it involved religious party and the Established Church. Ill understood, the question was ill cared for.<sup>46</sup>

Meyrick was vehement in his forecast of the effects.

The Bill was thus passed, and the victory of the Oxford Liberals was complete. Virtually or actually, the connection between the Church and the University, as such, was severed. . . . The Church party was beaten all along the line. The University of Laud ceased to be, and a new University was started on its course.<sup>47</sup>

Pusey agreed.

The university will be ruined and overthrown by a parri-  
cidal hand; Oxford will be lost to the Church; she will  
have to take refuge in colleges away from the university.  
Oxford has now received its deathblow from Mr. Gladstone  
and the government to which he belongs. I can no longer  
support at election times the worker of such an evil,  
and must return to the inactivity in things political,  
from which only love and confidence for Mr. Gladstone  
had roused me.<sup>48</sup>

The 1854 act did bring changes to Oxford, but it went only part of the way in reforming the university. Other reforms came one by one. Most important, the bill did not completely remove religious restrictions. Liberalism had won one victory, but that did not mean the liberals were dominant in Oxford.

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<sup>46</sup>Pattison, Suggestions, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup>Meyrick, p. 172.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Morley, 2:504.



Two years later a bill was introduced dealing with Cambridge. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies made one more attempt in a petition to remove religious restrictions completely. This was not implemented, but the bill was slightly more liberal than its counterpart for Oxford had been. The Cambridge bill provided for Dissenters to take Master's degrees, except in Divinity. Because the bill basically followed the lines already agreed upon in the debate on the Oxford bill, it passed even more easily. There was no discussion at all on the first and second readings.

The legislation of 1854 and 1856 was a compromise. Clerical control of the universities was weakened but not broken. With these measures, Dissenters gained momentum to fight for complete religious equality in higher education, and the Establishment's resistance was weakened. It would take fifteen more years, during which other reforms were instituted at the universities, but the character of Oxford and Cambridge was already so changed, that the final measure was inevitable.

## CHAPTER IV

The decade of the 1860s was a period in which the prevailing attitude concerning the Dissenting question was one of waiting--with either hope or dread, depending on viewpoint. It was clear to everyone that the universities would ultimately open complete membership to all persons regardless of religion. The final struggle was essentially an epilogue, because the eventual opening of fellowships and university government was a foregone conclusion. It was merely a matter of time. The length of time was what was under debate.

Several changes of attitude were taking place at the universities, resulting largely from the work of the commissions and the legislation of 1854 and 1856. The first change was a de-emphasizing of religion and a resulting freedom of opinion. Pattison described it in his Memoirs.

If any Oxford man had gone to sleep in 1846 and had woke up again in 1850 he would have found himself in a totally new world. . . . The dead majorities of heads and seniors, which had sat like lead upon the energies of tutors, had melted away. Theology was totally banished from the Common Room, and even from private conversation. Very free opinions on all subjects were rife; there was a prevailing dissatisfaction with our boasted tutorial system. A restless fever of change had spread through the colleges--the wonder-working phrase, University reform had been uttered, and that in the House of Commons. The sounds seemed to breathe new life in us.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that religion came to hold a position of less importance at the universities was not completely due to the admission of Dissenters.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Pattison, Memoirs (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885), pp. 244-45.

It was part of a trend which had begun with the weakening of the Evangelicals and then the exit of the Tractarians. There were simply no religious movements which commanded people's attention. The 1854 and 1856 legislation added to the effect, and the resulting lessening of religious emphasis helped bring more religious toleration.

At Oxford, the reaction of the Establishment to this change in attitude toward religion manifested itself in the founding of Keble College in 1866. Keble's purpose was

to be the embodiment of the denominational principle and even to perpetuate that principle which the new legislation had swept out of all the older colleges and out of the governing bodies of the university itself.<sup>2</sup>

The new college was by charter Anglican and admitted only Churchmen. Supporters saw it as an answer to the de-Christianization of the older colleges. Its opponents questioned the constitutionality of the university's admitting a new college. The illegality was never proved, and the college remained as evidence of Anglicanism's last major show of strength in Oxford.

When admitted to the universities after 1854, Dissenters proved to be very good students as a group. This became something of an embarrassment to some conservatives. In 1860, a Nonconformist graduate of Trinity, Cambridge, James Stirling, received the highest honors anyone had attained in the university in almost twenty years. The academic prestige of the college would have been raised considerably if Stirling had been elected to membership. But because he was a Nonconformist, he could not receive a fellowship. Subsequently, similar situations occurred almost every year. Many Nonconformists were angered. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies issued a statement in their Minutes.

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<sup>2</sup>Daily News, 10 December 1870. Quoted in Vivian H. H. Green, A History of Oxford University (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1974), p. 153.

The fact that Students at Cambridge who are Nonconformists have passed their examinations so successfully this year as to take the position of Senior and Third Wranglers forceably illustrates the grievance under which Dissenters labour. These gentlemen because they are Dissenters are unable to accept the Fellowships which, if they were members of the Established Church, would be awarded to them.<sup>3</sup>

An effect even more important than the anger of the Nonconformists themselves was the growing realization on the part of many members of the colleges that the level of scholarship could be raised by the ending of religious restrictions on fellowships.

Another result of the events of the 1850s was that many people were weary of fighting. The commissions' investigations and the resistance to them had been exhausting experiences, and few people wanted a repeat. The effect in a few cases was that people became more adamant than ever that the position of Dissenters in particular and university reform in general were closed issues. But more widely, the commissions and the legislation of the 1850s meant that conservative resistance was lowered.

Hence liberals persisted in driving home the points they had made in the arguments over the 1854 and 1856 bills. One point was that Oxford and Cambridge were not seminaries--not even primarily religious institutions. Religious tests would have been arguable if the universities had been theological institutions. But it had been laid down in principle that they were not, and the facts supported that principle. Harold Browne, Norrisian Professor of Divinity at Cambridge said,

Theology enters very little . . . into the ordinary studies of an undergraduate. It tells but very little

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Bernard Lord Manning, The Protestant Dissenting Deputies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 376.

even for the college examinations, . . . the ordinary degree, not at all for mathematical or classical honours.<sup>4</sup>

Another important principle that had been settled by the 1860s was that Oxford and Cambridge were institutions for scholarship as much as for teaching. Pattison was the strongest supporter of that concept. It was true in practice as well as in theory. The increased number of university professors meant that each was able to spend more time on research and writing. With a smaller percentage of people directly participating in the training of young men for positions, it was much harder to defend the proposition that membership in the Church of England was a necessary requirement for membership in the university.

The right of parliamentary intervention in the internal affairs of the universities had been upheld. Pattison justified it in his Suggestions on Academical Organisation.

The colleges are corporations enjoying property to certain uses. If this were all they are, Parliament, though it would still retain the right of interference, need not exercise the right till a case of abuse was alleged. But though colleges are this, they are more than this. They are endowed corporations through the medium of which the social body performs one of its vital functions. The State has accorded to the colleges, as it has to the Bank of England, exceptional privileges to enable them to discharge those functions. They not only share the protections of the Government with all other sanctioned institutions, but they are an essential part of that public machinery by which the national life is carried on. Protection is not enough. It must be among the duties of Government, under its responsibility to the nation, to watch unintermittingly over the university and to see that it does in practice efficiently discharge the functions assigned it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Student's Guide to the University of Cambridge (1863), p. 220. Quoted in Denys Arthur Winstanley, Later Victorian Cambridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Pattison, Suggestions on Academical Organisation, with Especial Reference to Oxford (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), p. 20.

The right of every Englishman to education in the national universities had been established. The issue that remained was that of university governance. There were many people who were quite fearful of opening the decision-making positions to non-Churchmen. The argument on this subject was not new: fear of irreligion. E. H. Perowne, in a sermon entitled "Corporate Responsibility," delivered on 15 June 1862, voiced that fear.

The University is . . . governed by the resident foundation members of colleges, and it is therefore essential to the well-being of the former that the qualification for admission to college fellowships should not be regarded as matters of indifference. . . . If no religious test is to be applied to a candidate for a fellowship, what guarantee have we that we may not be called upon to admit those who are not even Christians? We have no security against the admission of Socinians or Romanists or avowed unbelievers. And if such are numbered among the Fellows of a college, why not make them Tutors and Deans?<sup>6</sup>

Gladstone was another who had strong reservations as to the wisdom of allowing non-Churchmen to be part of the governing structure. The Rev. Baldwin Brown had written Gladstone pointing out that the participation of Dissenters in the national government was not catastrophic. Gladstone replied:

Differences of religious opinion in the State tend, as we see, to the continual agitation of questions respecting its relation to religion and religious bodies: a bearable evil, but an evil still. And would this evil be equally bearable in Oxford, where such controversies would so much (as in their now limited range they have already done) disturb and unsettle the faith of the young men?<sup>7</sup>

Another, unexpected, opposition came from some Dissenters. The fear was that the best minds were being turned away from Nonconformity.

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Winstanley, pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup>William E. Gladstone, Correspondence on Church and Religion, ed. D. C. Lathburg, 2 vols. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1910), 2:220.

The opening of the National Universities to Nonconformists has been, in my judgment, an injury rather than a help to Nonconformity. You are sending up here, year after year, the sons of some of your best and wealthiest families; they are often altogether uninfluenced by the services of the Church which they find here, and they not only drift away from Nonconformity--they drift away and lose all faith.<sup>8</sup>

On the political front, the 1860s were roughly divided between Liberal and Conservative ministries. The political party in office made little difference, though, because Parliament was not directing its attention towards domestic issues. Rather, its members were preoccupied with the actions of Napoleon III, the American Civil War, and Italy's fight for independence. When attention was diverted from foreign policy, it was concentrated on the second Reform Bill. Further, after 1865, Gladstone was no longer M.P. for Oxford University. The universities lost their strongest voice in Parliament. At that time Gladstone became leader in the House of Commons.

Throughout the sixties, the demand for further change in the universities' religious restrictions became stronger. Parliament received numerous petitions from both Oxford and Cambridge, some with very respected names on them. In 1863, a petition was sent from Oxford with the signatures of 106 heads of colleges, professors, and fellows. This was quite a change from the pre-1850 petitions. In 1868, another Oxford petition contained the names of 203 fellows. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies also issued numerous petitions, as could be expected. They submitted at least one petition each year from 1864 to 1869, with three in 1866. So many of these were

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<sup>8</sup>R. W. Dale, quoted in Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1936), pp. 321-22. During the debates on the 1864 bill to eliminate religious restrictions, one of the Nonconformist M.P.s rejected such an argument. Removal of tests might "take away the flower of Nonconformity," but he still supported the bill, because "some things are . . . greater than Nonconformity." Hansard 176 (1864): 1210.

rejected by the House of Lords that the Deputies issued a declaration that was bitter in its understatement: "[The Lords' actions] tends to shake their [Nonconformists'] confidence in the impartiality of that house."<sup>9</sup>

In May, 1863, Edward Pleydell-Bouverie introduced a bill to allow Nonconformists to hold fellowships and tutorships. This was still limited, because it left the issue of professors and heads of houses. The bill would have been permissive only; that is, it would have allowed but not required colleges to change their statutes so that Dissenters could be elected to fellowships.

The bill was doomed to failure. Dissenters opposed it as too conservative. Roman Catholics opposed the bill because it ignored them. Palmerston, the Prime Minister, invited the universities to express their feelings on the Pleydell-Bouverie bill. Cambridge sent the following excerpt from its Council minutes:

We deprecate any legislative enactment, through the provisions of which the government of the University or any of the colleges therein might pass into the hands of persons who are not members of the Church of England. . . . In such an event the confidence of a great portion of the public in the teaching in the University would be shaken, and its efficiency as a place of education would be seriously impaired.<sup>10</sup>

The bill was withdrawn. The same bill was re-introduced the following year but was defeated on the second reading. A slightly more liberal bill, introduced by J. G. Dodson, was defeated in July, 1864, after very little discussion. The next year's bill produced more debate. It was introduced by G. J. Goschen, who defended the bill, saying,

Sir, a very great fuss is made about admitting Dissenters to the government of the University. . . . We

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<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Manning, p. 374.

<sup>10</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d series, 170 (1863): 1241.



have admitted Jews, Catholics, and Dissenters to Parliament. Here they are, sitting and legislating for the University at this moment--legislating with infinitely greater effect than if they themselves in cap and gown were sitting in Convocation, making speeches in Latin.<sup>11</sup>

Goschen withdrew his bill after the second reading.

Gladstone opposed each of these bills, but the pressure was increasing and most liberal feelings were against his position. By the time he formed his first government in 1868, Gladstone realized that such legislation must be carried, but he still had reservations. He allowed Sir John Coleridge to bring in a university bill as a private measure, saying,

For me individually it would be beyond anything odious-- I am almost tempted to say it would be impossible-- after my long connection with Oxford, to go into a new controversy on the basis of what will be taken and alleged to be an absolute secularisation of the colleges; as well as a revisal of what was deliberately considered and sanctioned in the Parliamentary legislation of '54 and '56. I incline to think that that work is work for others, not for me.<sup>12</sup>

Coleridge's bill passed the Commons easily, showing the eagerness of all parties to be rid of the question. In the Lords, the Marquess of Salisbury introduced a limiting amendment. A Select Committee was appointed to study the amendment. The committee met, and this effectively killed the bill, but the discussion served to make the process smoother and easier when the bill was reintroduced the following year.

That time, in 1871, Gladstone allowed the bill to be presented as a government measure. He had come to see the necessity of lifting all religious tests as part of his plan of attack on privilege in general.<sup>13</sup> There

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<sup>11</sup>Hansard 180 (1865): 186.

<sup>12</sup>Gladstone, 2:221.

<sup>13</sup>Other measures tending in that direction included the abolition of the purchase of Army commissions, the opening of the civil service to competition, and the Elementary Education Act.

was still some opposition. Pusey called it the "battle . . . for Christian faith and Christian morals. It is for life itself."<sup>14</sup> But many conservative Anglicans were realizing that disabilities on Dissenters were winning them much sympathy. The fear was that it would become sympathy for non-belief.

After seven years of bills not sponsored by the government, Gladstone's bill passed the House of Commons quickly and the House of Lords with only slightly more difficulty. Negative reaction included that expressed by Lord Salisbury, when he said that the abolition of tests meant

turning what has been an institution for the education of youth in the principles of the dominant religion into a simple institution for grinding Latin and Greek into young minds.<sup>15</sup>

Liddon said that continuing to support the universities would be "combing the hair of a corpse."<sup>16</sup> But by this time, the overwhelming reaction was not protest, but relief. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies issued a resolution.

The Deputies congratulate their constituents on the passing of this Bill by which the right of all students at the National Universities to participate in future in the honours and emoluments of those Institutions without enforcing invidious tests is recognized and secured.<sup>17</sup>

Stanley was even more enthusiastic in a sermon preached at St. Mary's the following February.

There is the glorious prospect now for the first time revealed to Oxford of becoming not the battle-field of contending religious factions but the neutral, the sacred ground, where the healing genius of the place and the equal intercourse of blameless and generous

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<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Green, p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>Cecil, Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury 1:326. Quoted in Elliott-Binns, p. 322.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Elliott-Binns, p. 321.

<sup>17</sup>Manning, p. 377.

youth shall unite the long estrangements of Judah and of Ephraim, of Jerusalem and Samaria. There are the chances for the teachers and the students of the nineteenth century, such as have not been known in any previous age, for the reconciliation of the holy claims both of science and religion, of the love of truth and the love of goodness.<sup>18</sup>

The Universities Tests Act of 1871 did not apply to degrees or chairs in Divinity nor to any office which required the taking of Orders. Keble College at Oxford and Selwyn at Cambridge remained strictly Anglican. However, with these exceptions, Dissenters could proceed to any degree or office at either university.

The act was immediately followed by the establishment of halls for non-Anglicans in addition to the opening of the colleges to them. Other results were felt more gradually. Dissent and even agnosticism slowly became more respectable. Fellowships became more generally chosen on the basis of merit, as the colleges changed their statutes to comply with the act, ending much intellectual stagnation. There was a steady decrease in the number of religious personnel, and after 1882 clerical fellowships were in the minority and still declining.

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, M.A., Master of Balliol College, Oxford, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1897), 2:25.

## CONCLUSION

There were several requirements that had to be met before it was possible to admit Nonconformists to participation in the system of English higher education. First, general academic reform had to be effected, or at least initiated. It was necessary that the belief in the constitutions of the universities as immutable be broken down. Only by showing that many areas were in need of reform could the liberals win on the religious issue. Because of clerical control and high Church influence, academic reform could not avoid ultimately including the area of religious restrictions.

Second, there were several philosophical, political, and constitutional questions that had to be answered before Dissenters could be admitted. Were the universities national or private institutions? What right did the legislature have to control or interfere with the universities? What was the primary purpose of university education--general education or imparting of religious and moral values? Was the main function of the universities teaching or research and the expansion of knowledge? What part did the universities play in the constitutional connection between church and state? It took almost half a century for the political and intellectual nation to reach a concensus on these questions. When they did, it was on the liberal side. By that time, the majority of the Establishment was willing to accept the idea of Oxford and Cambridge as multi-sectarian institutions.

The demands of Dissenters for admission to the universities were an integral part of the attack on privilege that took place during the nineteenth century. The entire issue can be seen as a battle between the old and new orders in which the Church was required to justify its control of higher education. In the end, the Church failed to successfully assert the principle of Anglican domination. The Establishment emerged from the struggle weakened but not defeated. In this, as in other areas of reform, the old order gave way just in time--in time to avoid revolutionary activity, and in time to preserve itself in substance, even if altered in detail. The Establishment made a concession on the issue of education in order to save the principle of an established church. Thus, the admission of Dissenters to Oxford and Cambridge was one of many ways in which the social, intellectual, religious, and political fabric of the nation was changed, but enough of the old order was preserved to make the ultimate breakdown a very slow and essentially peaceful process.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Among the major primary sources for this study are the Parliamentary Debates and Sessional Papers. The subject was debated intensely throughout the period, the floor of the House of Commons being the primary battleground. Particularly during the 1860s, a bill to reform the admission policies of the universities was a "hardy annual."<sup>1</sup> Among the Parliamentary Papers are the reports of the Oxford and Cambridge Commissions. While neither report explicitly recommended the lifting of religious restrictions, it was a topic very much in the minds and discussions of the commissioners. The commissions were also important in the religious question because of its connection with overall university reform, which was the commissions' primary charge.

A second category of primary source material includes pamphlets, sermons, and speeches. A large number of pamphlets were printed presenting arguments on both sides of the question, but particularly the conservative opinion. Availability of such pamphlets is very limited in the United States, but several were obtained for this study. Most of these were written by members of the universities: Mark Pattison, Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford; Connop Thirwall, Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge; Thomas Turton, Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge; William Sewell, Fellow of Queens, Oxford. Speeches include those of Gladstone, J. H. Newman, and E. B. Pusey.

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<sup>1</sup>A. I. Tillyard, A History of the University Reform From A.D. 1800 to the Present Time, with Suggestions Towards a Complete Scheme for the University of Cambridge (Cambridge: W. Hegger & Sons, Ltd., 1913), p. 200.

A third category of primary sources comprises printed diaries, memoirs, and letters. These are numerous and useful. Consulted for this study have been those of Pattison; Gladstone; Benjamin Jowett, Fellow of Balliol, Oxford; Newman; Sir William Hamilton, Professor in the University of Edinburgh; and A. P. Stanley, Dean of Westminster and Secretary of the Oxford Commission.

Newspapers and periodicals were not a forum for debate on the issue nearly as much as were printed pamphlets. The major exception is Sir William Hamilton's important articles in the Edinburgh Review. A few Dissenting periodicals, most notably the Eclectic Review, have been helpful. Other contemporary periodicals used include the Times, the Quarterly Journal of Education, the Westminster Review, and the Christian Advocate.

Secondary source material can be divided into three main groups. The first is English religious histories, the most important being histories of Nonconformity. Of these, Bernard L. Manning, The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, and L. E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era, have been especially useful. A more general work is Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church.

A second category contains histories of English education. These include, more specifically, works on Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, and London. These generally contain discussions of the issue of the admission of Dissenters written from the view point of the universities. Among these works are William R. Ward's Victorian Oxford, C. E. Mallet's History of the University of Oxford, Vivian H. H. Green's Religion at Oxford and Cambridge, and D. A. Winstanley's Early Victorian Cambridge and Later Victorian Cambridge.

A third type of secondary sources is biographies of the principal figures involved in the movement. These include studies of Gladstone, Pattison, Jowett, Thomas Arnold, Sewell, Christopher Wordsworth (Master of Trinity, Cambridge), William Whewell (Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge), Hamilton, and Stanley.

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