

Register May 20th 1885.

REFORMS IN THE ADELAIDE
UNIVERSITY.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—I have read with a considerable amount of interest the article on "Reforms in the Adelaide University," which appeared in this day's issue of your paper. I cannot endorse all the thoughts of the writer, nor should I be at all pleased to see some of his suggested reforms brought about. For good training of the mind there can be no study so useful as that of the classics, and next in order might be placed that of mathematics. To take these off the list of compulsory subjects would be an error. My object in writing this letter may be stated in a few words. The number of subjects imposed on the matriculation student of our University are too many. It is not such an evil to those who have succeeded in passing the junior, but woe betide the youth or man who fancies that (not having passed the above) it will be all smooth sailing. Such is certainly not the case. Now there are in our city numbers of young men of average ability who, desirous of pushing their way in the world of knowledge, are either shut out from the Adelaide University altogether or are condemned to two or three years of the most exhausting study. Should they succeed in passing the matriculation, it is almost certain that the knowledge they have previously crammed in will be lost for ever. Boys at school are differently situated. Five or six years can be passed away, and to them it matters little; but to young men having to work for a living the doors of this University in many cases are closed. It would be easy for me to point out many such cases, but I trust some one will arise in our midst able and willing to devote his time in urging on the authorities of the University the necessity of curtailing the number of compulsory subjects.

I am, Sir, &c.,

ONE OUTSIDE

May 19.

Register May 22nd 1885

UNIVERSITY REFORMS.—OUR
ACADEMIC SOLONS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—The thanks of the young men in Adelaide reading for matriculation are due to Mr. Leary for the able paper in which he advocates a reform in the Adelaide University. I

fully endorse the remarks of "Outside," when he said of the matriculation examination, "To young men having to work for a living the doors of this University in many cases are closed. The number of subjects imposed on the matriculation student of our University are too many." It is all very plausible to raise the cry, "Don't lower the examination." In raising this absurd cry, the Professors, Councillors, and Senators (including the Chief Justice and the Bishop himself) act somewhat ungenerously, nay, cruelly to the Australian young men, by demanding of them to pass an ordeal to which the above distinguished personages were not subjected. Why should we, South Australian young men, be overwhelmed with a formidable list of subjects unknown to Sydney, Melbourne, Cambridge, Dublin, Edinburgh, and even more numerous than London itself? The Inns of Court, London, do not insist upon their students passing the matriculation examination of the London University before admitting them as law students. If they did make such a rule, there is no doubt that the Londoners would resist, and with justice too, so tyrannical an imposition. Is it not unreasonable, then, that the above academic Solons, sitting complacently in their easy chairs of state, should dictate and impose literary and scientific burdens on others, such as they did not touch or could not touch themselves?

People have constantly on their lips, "Do to others as you would have others do to you." The Chinese form would suit this case better. "Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you." Now, which of the framers of the matriculation course, or which of the Council who tacitly approve of it, has ever passed in this course or in one so extensive? I believe that a committee of law students could make up such a paper in arithmetic as would puzzle even the Bishop himself, and a paper so difficult in quadratics as would stump Professors Kelly and Boulger, and one so knotty in history as to bowl out Professor Lamb, and so many crabbed passages from the "De Amicitia" as would plough Professor Tate. Now, though each of the above-named distinguished men might be plucked on some uncongenial subject, I should not think anything the less of them in their own speciality.

Why should the above eminent men be compelled to abandon that profession for which Nature fitted them? Simply because some hard-hearted taskmasters—the Pharaohs of education—insist upon their being well-versed in subjects for which Nature did not fit them. Change the name merely, and the case aptly applies to us unfortunate law students. There is a strong suspicion outside that the University Council is dominated by a small coterie of three or four, who, fond of prominence and popularity, and fancying themselves Titans in intellect and attainments, but usually estimated as dwarfs outside of this colony, support each other's pet schemes and carry their point, the rest of the Council being either indifferent and careless, or not understanding such terribly abstruse questions, all academic subjects being Greek to them.

The Council wants a large transfusion of new blood, otherwise the University will die of paralysis. Its results are awfully bad and unsatisfactory. Melbourne is not far off.

I am, Sir, &c., LEX.

Register May 21/85

UNIVERSITY REFORM,

TO THE EDITOR.

[Sir—Mr. Leary seems very anxious to make out that the Adelaide University examinations are unfairly hard, but he must be aware that they are not so hard as those of say London University. No doubt if the examinations were easier more candidates would pass and gain degrees, but then the degrees would not be even approximately equal to the corresponding ones in other Universities, and this is a result which the authorities are anxious to avoid. The difficulty of an examination does not by any means entirely depend upon the number of subjects which have to be taken up for it, but on the standard of acquaintance with those subjects which is required. This standard is practically set by the students themselves, a few of whom—the best—are put into the first class, while those who have done worse than the best and better than the worst go into the second class, and the rest form the third class or are ploughed. Even if the curriculum of Adelaide University were precisely the same as that of older Universities the examinations must be easier, because the competition is far from being so keen. If the examiners set up an absolute, and not a relative standard, possibly no one at all would pass, and the examination would be thought a farce.

It is not necessary to enter into elaborate details to show that the Adelaide matricula-

tion is not unduly hard; it is enough to point to the fact that the great majority of boys who are prepared for it do pass it without any excessive effort or strain on their part, and even very dull boys can be driven through it. Mr. Leary several times alludes to the twelve subjects for matriculation, and to the "gigantic work" necessary to enable a student to pass the examination, but these statements must be accepted with some caution. Six of the subjects have, in most cases, been passed in the junior examination, and even if they have not been so passed a certificate of having passed in them can be obtained by a student who fails to pass the entire examination, and on again coming up he need pass in the optional subjects only. Latin, mathematics, and two optional subjects are thus left, and even if three optional subjects are taken up this makes five subjects, in only four of which it is necessary to pass. Surely no one could think of comparing this Examination with the London University matriculation, in which there are ten subjects, in every one of which it is necessary to pass at the same time. If a candidate fails in one of the ten he must start all afresh, until he passes in all at one examination. But that the examination is not too difficult is proved by two considerations—first, that the standard is not high; and second, that the standard in this as in all competitions (whether of men or racehorses) is, to a large extent, fixed by the competitors themselves. Mr. Leary quotes Faraday, Sir William Hamilton, and others as specialists. So they were; but one cannot help suspecting that men of their capacity could pretty easily have got up, had it been absolutely necessary, enough of any, even the most distasteful subject, to pass an ordinary examination. Many men who are very distinguished in one subject have no inaptitude for others, but are obliged to decide to which to devote themselves. Many high classics at Cambridge could have been high wranglers had they devoted themselves to mathematics. Besides, to really distinguished men a degree adds no lustre; it is a distinction to lesser men.