

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 1884

THE EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY FESTIVAL

THE brilliant celebration of its three hundredth anniversary by the University of Edinburgh last week suggests some reflections on the connection between University progress and the growth of Science. One of the most remarkable features in these festive proceedings has been the preponderance given to the recognition of the claims of scientific research to University distinction. A hundred years ago and less, had such a gathering been thought of, the great men who would have been invited to receive the highest academic honours would have been learned scholars, eminent professors of the mediæval branches of education, with perhaps a few distinguished medical men and doubtless a good many candidates whose only claim would have been the possession of a hereditary title of nobility. But now a new host of competitors has arisen, and upon them have the laurels of the University been mainly bestowed. Physicists, chemists, physiologists, botanists, geologists, and other representatives of modern science have almost elbowed the older philosophies out of the field. In the pæan sung at every meeting of the festival the brilliance of scientific discovery, the prowess of scientific discoverers, and the glory shed on the University by its connection with both have been the chief themes.

This great change in the objects of University recognition has been silently in progress for several generations. But it has never been so openly and strikingly proclaimed as during these recent meetings at Edinburgh. It is not that any formal alteration has there been made in the curriculum of study. On the contrary, the same subjects are still required for degrees in Arts as were demanded centuries ago. Outside the conservative government of the University there has, however, been a steady growth of modern ideas, modern life, and modern science. To the Medical School, in the first place, must the credit be assigned of fostering this wider culture. Its professors have thrown open their old monopoly of teaching, and work harmoniously with their competitors outside the walls of the University. They have cast aside the ancient inefficient system of mere prelections, and have introduced practical teaching into every branch of their science. To pass from the state of things in the youth of these teachers to what they have now made it is to cross a gulf such as might be thought to mark an interval of some centuries. Everywhere we see practical scientific research taking the place of musty lecture-notes and dry unproductive text-books. Not only have the professors aimed at being successful teachers, but many of them have themselves led the way in original discovery. They have likewise kept themselves and their students abreast of the progress of research all over the world. Hence the names of Continental men of science have become household words among the rising generation. We can readily understand and sympathise with the uncontrollable outburst of enthusiasm with which the students greeted the actual appearance among them of a Pasteur, a Helmholtz, and a Virchow.

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Silently and unconsciously perhaps the Universities are passing from the exclusive domination of the older learning. At Edinburgh the emancipation is far advanced, but has yet to take shape in a definite rearrangement of the curriculum of study. No thoughtful scientific man would advocate a merely scientific education. The foundations of every man's culture should be laid broad and deep in those humanising departments of thought which the experience of centuries has proved to be admirably fitted for the mental and moral discipline of youth. But the day is not far distant when it will be acknowledged that modern science must be admitted to a place with ancient philosophy and literature in the scheme of a liberal education, when in all our Universities provision will be made for practical instruction in scientific methods, and when at least as much encouragement will be given by fellowships and scholarships to the prosecution of original scientific research as has hitherto been awarded to classical study or learned indolence.

To those who hopefully look forward to the widening and broadening of University culture the Edinburgh festival is full of encouragement. Such a gathering of representative intellect has probably never before been assembled. Delegates from the oldest and youngest Universities of the world, from scientific societies and other learned bodies, brought their congratulations to their northern sister. But they felicitated her not so much because she had been a successful educational centre for three hundred years, as because she had held up the torch of scientific discovery, because her professors and graduates had widened the boundaries of knowledge and deciphered new pages in the great book of Nature. If such has been the result of the trammelled past with all its hampering traditions and vested interests, its obstructions and jealousies, what may we not anticipate for the liberated future! After the lapse of another century, what new conquests will there not be to chronicle, what new realms of discovery to celebrate! In this ever-advancing progress, the University of Edinburgh, which has done so much in bygone years, will doubtless more than hold her own. No centre of education and research has greater advantages in its favour. The comparatively small size of the city, the proximity of its lecture-rooms, laboratories and libraries to each other; its vicinity to the sea on the one hand and to a varied and picturesque country on the other, combine to offer exceptional advantages to the student. Not the least of its attractions is its own unchanging beauty, which never ceases to appeal to the eye and to stimulate the imagination. Long may Edinburgh remain a beacon of light in educational advancement, in the cultivation of scientific methods, and in the march of scientific discovery.

PRJEVALSKY'S TRAVELS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Third Journey in Central Asia. From Zaisan through Khami to Thibet and the Sources of the Yellow River.

By N. M. Prjevalsky. Russian. (St. Petersburg, 1883.)

THIS large work is the complete account of the third journey of Col. Prjevalsky to Thibet, notices of the progress of which from time to time appeared in our pages during the year 1880. The first journey, it will be

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