

**THE ATTACK UPON THE
UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD: IN A
LETTER TO EARL GREY**

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The Attack Upon the University of Oxford: In a Letter to Earl Grey by W. Sewell

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THE ATTACK UPON
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN A LETTER TO EARL GREY.

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It must seem a great presumption for an individual to give publicity again to opinions on a question which so deeply interests such a body as the University of Oxford. But a former pamphlet, connected with the subject, being now out of print, I have thought it better to throw nearly the same observations into a shorter and more general form, than to publish a second edition.

WILLIAM SEWELL.

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LETTER.

MY LORD,

THE result of a debate in the House of Commons, has just been made known, by which that branch of the legislature has authorized the introduction of a Bill for throwing open the Universities of England to all classes and descriptions of Dissenters. This Bill is in a most marked and especial manner sanctioned by his Majesty's Ministers. But it is not a plan of their own.

There is no time to enlarge upon the question. Every hour in which the House of Commons is sitting is now an hour of peril. The whole country must feel it. No sensible man can now take up the journals of the day, without trembling at the constant probability of meeting, in some corner of the paper, in some midnight debate, or hastily drawn statute, the most deadly and destructive principles, coiled up in some frivolous measures, unobserved, and unexposed before the public. No man can tell any longer for how many days he may reckon on a single possession which he enjoys, whether of principle, of property, or right. Our legislation

is too rapid. We cannot keep pace with it, even in our thoughts. The House of Commons, in the hands of the government, or rather the government in the hands of the House of Commons, is a lever which is now hourly in motion to tear up some foundation, or unsettle some mode of conduct, or pull down some established institution. The very ground beneath our feet is not safe. God knows where it is all to end.

My Lord, in a single session, without the slightest examination, without any evidence before you of the working of the plan—one University with its whole body crying out against it—the other nearly unanimous—unanimous in all those minds most competent to decide on questions of morals, and religion, and discipline, though not perhaps on mathematics and geology, which are not the subjects in dispute—not only this, but at the bidding of men who come avowedly before the legislature as enemies of the Established Church—who declare that all their measures at this moment are intended to undermine and subvert it—whom none but the Government persist in pronouncing very moderate petitioners, and who spontaneously and indignantly reject this moderate interpretation of their views—you are about, not perhaps deliberately, but with your eyes open, and your intentions, it is asserted, friendly to the Church established in this country, to strike the most

deadly blow at its religion, next to the starvation of its ministry, which in all strictness of logical conclusion must very soon follow, that man ever dared to attempt who believed in a God and his Bible.

May I place before your Lordship very shortly, (God grant that the public likewise may be roused to attention) the facts of the case. It is their interest, not the interest of any individual, or any class connected with the Universities by the wages of money or place—not the interest of these bodies in the mass, whose dignity and character may perish without touching one selfish member—nor is it the interest exclusively of the Church—the laymen, even more than the clergy, who constitute the greatest religious corporation in this country—it is the interest of the whole nation—of all who love religion—pure, vital, tolerant religion—who would save their unborn generations from the spread of the most noxious poisons—who do not wish this country to become a philosophical, scientific, mathematical, revolutionary, infidel France—it is their interest which is at stake in this question—remote as it may seem, and little as they have thought on it—whether any Dissenters or none are to be admitted henceforth within our walls.

My Lord, these Universities are at present—they have been for years and years—they

never will consent to be otherwise—great incorporations and societies—not merely for the encouragement of literature—no man who founded our endowments dreamed of such a thing—not a statute in one of our colleges would fail to cry out against the thought—they are incorporations for the purpose of education. They are practically—no possible spoliation of property could make it otherwise—no economy or parsimony could prevent it—confined to the great mass of Englishmen who, from their wealth and connection, form the highest ruling ranks in society. English gentlemen nearly all of them belong to the Established Church of England. The proportion is enormous. There are gentlemen—honourable, cultivated, high-minded gentlemen—among the Dissenters. But the great bulk of Dissenters, from the very causes which generated Dissent, is formed of the poorer classes, of those who cannot by possibility have an interest in University arrangements. Will your Lordship observe the two parties against whom you are legislating. Practical necessity, which with any wise legislator is as strong as legal right, constitutes the aristocracy of this country—the word is used in its widest sense, as comprehending the peerage, the gentry, the clergy, the liberal professions, the great establishments of commerce—it constitutes the whole of this body, (is it a body to

be trifled with?) one, and the very principal party affected by this new scheme. It is a scheme for introducing a change in their place and plan of education. They have an interest, an infinitely deeper interest in any such change than the great bodies of the Universities themselves. We are affected in our corporate capacities, in which we neither feel disgrace nor sustain personal harm. They are reached through their children. And the blow will come home to them. If they do not feel their position, and rouse themselves to ward it off, it will be surprising and alarming. Many men will despair of their country.

The other body, My Lord, with which you are about to interfere, are the Universities themselves. They have a vast stake in this country. They have a very high character. The very ground on which their rights are invaded is that their learning and discipline, and high principles, and religion, have exposed them to the envy of those who are now excluded from their benefits. They spread their roots through the whole nation. Many years have now passed since young men have been accustomed to quit us and turn afterwards in flippancy and pertness to ridicule the instructors of their youth. All the soundest part of the community is deeply and sincerely attached to our welfare, and to the system by which it is secured. Your Lordship, it is said, cannot understand this feeling—if it