

*Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* is a fine and a useful book. Sullivan's presentation of sources and her commentary on them should serve as an inspiration to many, most especially to other communities of religious and to authors interested in scholarly biography.

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Elisabeth Leedham-Green. *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 274. US\$54.95, cloth; US\$17.95, paper.

Universities have always been self-important institutions. Although they do not hold a monopoly on pomposity, they can usually be counted on to provide a fine example. Rarely do they resist an opportunity to broadcast their contribution to intellectual life and "Civilization." The objective of these and other exercises in public relations is, of course, to protect and to extend privilege, and to ensure a measure of veneration. The first objective has as its secondary aim to keep the mundane world at bay, and the second provides the cash to continue.

Leedham-Green's monograph fits into this genre, being a history of Cambridge University published by Cambridge University. The author coyly declares a need for a new "portable" history of "one of the world's greatest academic institutions." Why one quite needs to carry a standard introduction to the place in one's pocket is not vouchsafed. Perhaps it is to provide ammunition for its members in the perennial game of one-upmanship played with Oxford. It is something the author clearly enjoys, telling readers gleefully, "As so often Cambridge had started [origin] after Oxford and finished first [recognition]" (pg. 4).

In broad terms, the author's primary objective is to show how, over 800 years, the University reacted to, or, most of the time, rebuffed external pressures to change. Day-to-day experiences of students, teachers, and administrators, potted descriptions of the University Press and University Library, and information on a number of celebrated (a word used often) individuals at the "the World's best University" provide lively asides. Leedham-Green refers more difficult enquiries about the University's scholarship to the multi-volume history also now being published by the home press. Alternatively, one is invited to consult Christopher Brooke's *Oxford and Cambridge* (1988), or other books on an extensive list.

The story begins with the grudging admission that the University owes its beginnings to Oxford, the result of possibly the original "Town versus Gown" dispute in England. Two Oxford scholars were hung by the town authorities in 1209, having been convicted of murdering a woman. In protest, the University voluntarily suspended its operations, as the executions breached ecclesiastical privilege and the king, in dispute with the Church, had refused protection. The scholars dispersed. Some trudged to Cambridge. Five years later the Pope and King John reconciled. Most of the academics returned to Oxford and the town was ordered by the Papal Legate to pay reparations and surrender additional privileges. Some refugees remained in Cambridge and by 1225 they had achieved corporation status and acquired a chancellor of their own.

In later centuries the University prospered. Support from Crown and Church developed into a link with authority that allowed the University's legal position to be consolidated by the middle of the fifteenth century and to remain more or less unchanged until the nineteenth. Popular applause has been a bit more difficult to achieve. Vigorous battles with the townsfolk, objecting to "unwarranted" privileges, have led to countless disputes. It is a local animosity not yet fully disposed of. Generally, however, the age-long identification with power has given Cambridge University, in tandem with Oxford, an unrivalled and envied position in British society.

The academic system of syndicates, schools and subject combinations at Cambridge is one that even seasoned students at the place find confusing. Leedham-Green navigates the waters easily and corrects many misconceptions. Leedham-Green treats the early period chronologically, placing each "advance" in context. The Reformation, the Stuarts, the Plague, and the Civil War (Cambridge was generally Royalist) are all neatly summarized and march past, colours flying. Various architectural additions, the progress of mathematics and physics, and luminaries, Newton among them, are similarly celebrated. The author pays attention to one of the more instructive debates of the modern period, the question of standards and the style of examination. Moves to reform these areas still trouble Cambridge and are reluctantly adopted only when absolutely necessary. Such decisions, usually introduced University-wide, threaten College autonomy and the treasured connection between master and pupil. Individual objection, as the author notes, is a formidable obstacle, even to the most trivial of practical changes.

The book offers many tales of the peculiarities of the system. Most British historians, for example, are aware that university education toward the end of the eighteenth century deteriorated and the number of students declined. Leedham-Green's description of student-evaluation techniques helps to explain growing public indifference to the University's claims. "Disputations" formed the first stage of assessment of the B.A. Degree. For the weaker

students, these had become a farce. One student would say, "*Recte statuit Newtonus*" (Newton is right); a second would reply "*Non Recte statuit Newtonus*" (Newton is not right). They would then change places. For the more serious, less well-connected student, the stakes were higher, a job, and the tests subsequently more rigorous. In the second stage, students would repair to the Senate House to write down answers called out by examiners. Weaker or uninterested students would leave early. The rest would gradually be reduced until strict order of merit could be produced, divided into three classes: wranglers, senior optimes, and junior optimes. The best would be named "Senior Wrangler." Most of the answers elicited were routine and uninspired, the result of careful coaching by instructors who knew the examiners. Top students were rewarded, becoming Fellows of the University. Most, having laboured mightily to achieve that status, thereafter relaxed and lived as "gentry." Teaching "was something that someone else did." Further study was unnecessary. The whole exercise hardly provided an educational experience and the wealthier pupils treated Cambridge lightly, often leaving at the earliest opportunity.

Reforms began early in the nineteenth century but it took a Royal Commission's report to concentrate minds. The Cambridge Bill, passed in 1856, provided Commissioners to oversee the University's response to the recommendations. However, Colleges fought rearguard actions over such diverse questions as celibacy and taxation, new science subjects, and new colleges, and those actions "divided and paralysed" most reform efforts.

Nevertheless, change could not be denied. Needham-Green describes much of that change. Religious tests, for example, were removed in 1870, except for heads of houses and graduates of theology. On the other hand, full admission for women had to wait until 1948 (Oxford had instituted it in 1920). Girton College (first five women admitted 1869) and Newnham College (1871) provided an opportunity to sit examinations. Their success soon became notable although they could not claim the degree. In 1890, Philippa Fawcett was declared, to the consternation of many, "above the Senior Wrangler."

The twentieth century ushered in rapid change and increased financial resources. The range of subjects available for study, new schools, and new buildings allowed an amazing expansion. The number of matriculations 1900–89 rose fivefold. A few beneficiaries have been children of the poorer classes. The Education Act (1960) and the Robbins Report (1963) were both intended, in part, to promote such opportunities. But their numbers remain tantalizingly small. The largest gains have been made by children of the middle classes whose parents send them to Public (private and fee-paying) schools.

The institution, therefore, largely remains the preserve of the privileged, albeit a widened moneyed one. Attendance at Oxford or Cambridge, known

collectively as Oxbridge, continues to be recognized as a passport into the ranks of the establishment. Civil servants, business executives, and most certainly politicians (including those in the Labour party) mix with the old aristocracy/gentry to form an irresistible combination. Some historians consider the 1832 Reform Act to be a takeover of like-minded outsiders by the insiders in Parliament. Oxbridge has clearly followed that successful impulse. Reforms in structure are still resisted. Why risk a winning formula? Colleges, in particular, guard their rights jealously and the "old boy," now also "old girl" (one successful reform) network is strongest at that level. If one looks for an egalitarian impulse in the modern Cambridge, it maybe found in the increase in post-graduate study. The best graduates of the provincial universities, bolstered by eager overseas students, naturally covet the cachet that an Oxbridge degree confers.

Those wishing to purchase a concise history of Cambridge need look no further. The book is well produced. The appendices, glossary, an excellent section offering suggestions for further reading, and the index, together with some well-chosen photographs, are all useful. One might quibble with Leedham-Green's emphases. However, the only area of general educational interest she overlooks is sport. Mention is made of the early competition between Oxford and Cambridge in the manly art of lying but others are mostly neglected. There is a tendency to wallow in excessive triumphalism but, as the author would undoubtedly retort, is that not justified?

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Marjorie Theobald. *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 294. US\$59.95, cloth.

Marjorie Theobald's beautiful book, *Knowing Women*, is both a social history of Australian women's education and a broader discussion of the status of women's educational history. The book is organized as a series of interconnected essays ranging from specific historical topics in the history of Australian women's education (ladies' academies, women in higher education, teachers, secondary schooling, and the schooling of "outcast girls"), but the effect of the book is to raise questions much wider than those of Australian women's educational history. In her examination of how and why primary, secondary, and tertiary education for women developed in Australia, the author touches on the relationship of feminist and post-modern theories to