

CUS417/16.3

jointly, have the right to stop all matters, except elections, by an absolute negative: otherwise every question is decided by the majority of votes.

For the better government of the University, a sort of *Council*, devised probably by Archbishop Laud, was instituted in 1631 by King Charles I. It consisted of the Heads of Houses and the Proctors, and, from being appointed to hold a weekly meeting every Monday, became known by the name of the **HEBDOMADAL BOARD**; but it was convened by the Vice-Chancellor on other days also, as occasion required. The business of this Board was to deliberate on all matters relating to the maintenance of the privileges and liberties of the University, or to the due observance of its statutes and customs, and generally to consider and discuss every measure tending to the improvement or benefit of the University before such measure should be submitted for the approval of the whole academical body in Convocation assembled. It thus had the *initiative* in all the legislation of the University, and in fact no question of any sort could be submitted to the votes of Convocation without the sanction of this Board.

In this constitution of the University the Act of Parliament of 1854 above referred to (17 and 18 Vict. c. 81) made a considerable change. It left indeed, at least it has been interpreted as having left, the two ancient assemblies of Congregation and Convocation: but it added a third, which is now called, in the terms of the Act, the **CONGREGATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**; and it transferred all the "powers, privileges, and functions" of the old Hebdomadal Board to another body of persons, called the **HEBDOMADAL COUNCIL**.

A Register of the persons of whom this new **CONGREGATION** consists is made and published by the Vice-Chancellor every year before the 25th day of September. It comprises certain official persons, and all those members of Convocation who resided within one mile and a-half of Carfax for twenty weeks during the year which ended on the first day of September last. The Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor, with the Proctors, preside at its meetings, as in the two ancient Houses. No particular number of members is requisite to make a meeting.

THE **HEBDOMADAL COUNCIL** consists of some official and some elected members. The official members are the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the late Vice-Chancellor (for one year at least from the expiration of his term of office), and the two Proctors. The elected members are six Heads of Colleges or Halls, six Professors, and six other members of Convocation, who however may be Heads of Houses or Professors, and the six Professors may be Heads of Houses. These persons are elected by the Congregation of the University of Oxford for six years, in such a manner that one-half of each of the three classes vacate their seats every three years, being, however, capable of re-election. To this Council, as has been stated above, "all powers, privileges, and functions possessed or exercised by the Hebdomadal Board" have been transferred, and therefore it has the *initiative* in all the legislation of the University.

The ancient **HOUSE OF CONGREGATION** has now nothing to do

with legislation in any form, and its business is confined almost exclusively to the granting of degrees, a matter upon which in ancient times the persons of whom the House is composed were necessarily the fittest judges¹. When a student has passed all the Examinations, kept all the Terms, and reached the Standing required by the statutes, and has obtained the *grace*, or permission, of his own College or Hall, it is still necessary for him to *supplicate* the *grace* of this House in order to his admission to any degree. And, when a *supplicat* (as it is called) is read out, every member of the House has the power to suspend the granting of the *grace* three times, in three distinct Congregations, without giving any reason for his negative; but after the third refusal he is required to state privately to the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors the ground and proof of his objection, which are to be submitted to the judgment of the whole House at the next Congregation without any publication of the objector's name, and the question is then decided by a majority of votes, unless the Vice-Chancellor singly, or the two Proctors jointly, should interpose the negative which is allowed to them officially on every matter proposed in Congregation. Should the *grace* be thus refused the fourth time, a full year must pass before the candidate may apply for it again. The actual suspension of a *grace*, however, is a thing now almost unknown, but the threat of it is said to be sometimes employed in order to compel payment of debts.

The business of the new CONGREGATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, on the other hand, is confined almost exclusively to matters of legislation. When the Hebdomadal Council has framed any new Statute, it must first be *promulgated*, after due notice, in this assembly, and the question that the principle of the Statute as stated in the Preamble be approved must then be submitted to Congregation. Any members of Congregation may propose amendments at the time of promulgation; and such amendments, provided that they have been seconded by another member of Congregation, and that they are not in the judgment of the Chancellor or his Deputy inconsistent with or irrelevant to the principle of the Statute as stated in the Preamble, must be printed and taken into consideration at a subsequent meeting of Congregation. The Council may at the same time and on the same paper print any amendments which they may think fit to propose. If any such amendments, whether proposed by the Council or by individual members of Congregation, are adopted by Congregation, it is in the power of either the Council or any twelve members of Congregation to propose further amendments. If no amendment be proposed, or when all the proposed amendments and further amendments, if any, have

¹ The framers of the Act of 1854 certainly intended that the old Congregation should be superseded by the new, which, as the Bill was first drawn, was to consist of those persons only who in these days are engaged in the discipline and education of the University, just as the ancient House is composed of those only who in ancient times were charged with that discipline and education. But this restriction being opposed in the House of Commons, the minister who had charge of the Bill consented to admit into the new assembly all resident Members of Convocation. And, shortly after the passing of the Act, a legal opinion was given by a lawyer of great eminence, that it did not abolish the old House of Congregation.