The ‘New Oxford’

Student “discipline” at the University of Mississippi has broken down into the spectacle of a lone woman English instructor, threading her way among the cafeteria tables at some risk to what we envision as her pince nez glasses, and threatening to “take the names” of any of her own students found among the more stridently vocal of the Southern gentlemen assembled there.

Alas, we fear that if the lady really expects to get anything accomplished, she’ll have to bring her broom next time, and start laying about on her own, for she apparently cannot count on very much help from the University’s administrators.

To put the question of student discipline in somewhat better focus, let us imagine what would have happened had a hundred or so easily identifiable male students converged upon the living quarters of one of the school’s recent “Miss America” contest winners with larcenous designs on her smallclothes. The villains would have been back among the crossroads’ cotton gins in time for Saturday night’s revels or, at the very least, bound henceforward by the strictest sort of campus probation.

We frankly do not know what can or ought to be done about the University of Mississippi as a supposed center of humane studies. If the school had been worth much in the first place, it is unlikely that William Faulkner would have left Oxford for Charlottesville and the University of Virginia once he had yielded to the cogent virus.

One dubious advantage of being a faculty member at a place like Ole Miss is that if you’ve lived long enough you’ve been through it all before. It was roughly 30 years ago that the late Theodore (The Man) Bilbo, then governor, decreed the University faculty almost for the fun of it; now, not at all surprisingly, the exodus is again.

When the process goes far enough, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools will have no choice but to force Ole Miss’s “disaffiliation” (to borrow from the language of John L. Lewis’s secession from the CIO) and in time, we suppose, the National Collegiate Athletic Association will have to take steps, too. If it is to remain in business, the New Oxford then will have little choice but to apply for membership in the National Football League, where the students and dons left in the one remaining department (Phys Ed) will have to come to grips with the same old problem.

Fortunately, from the example of the innumerable Ole Miss grads already performing in the pro leagues, the player suddenly thrust out into the world finds that the dilemma is easier solved in terms of an NFL or AFL paycheck than in terms of what the over-paternalistic Mississippi legislature thinks is best for growing (and we mean growing!) boys.