

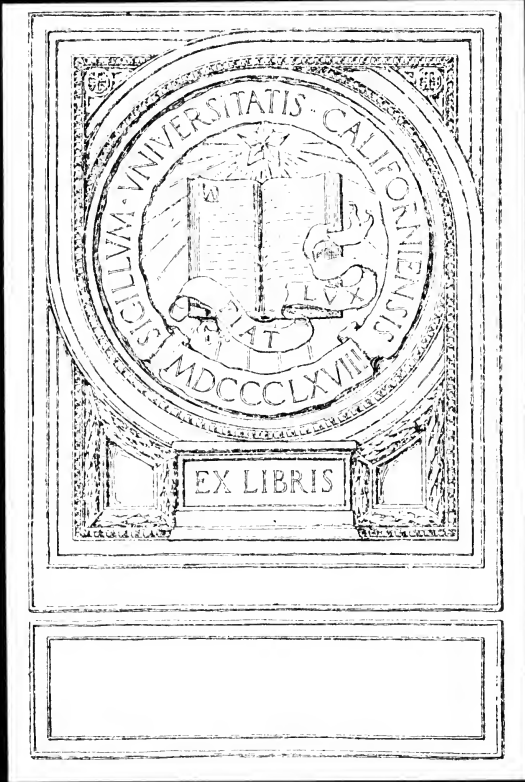
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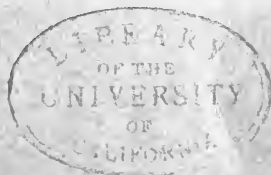
GLIMPSES OF OXFORD
DURING THE THIRTEENTH,
FOURTEENTH AND
FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

by

LOWELL JOSEPH RAGATZ

GIFT
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PREFACE

The object of this work is indicated exactly by its title—to give glimpses of Oxford during the twelve, thirteen and fourteen hundreds. It was during these centuries that the university gradually evolved from a number of halls and colleges. Not until the close of the period named did the system of halls come to an end; only then did the colleges, hitherto largely outside the university, come under its co-ordinating control. The Oxford we are to consider, then, is the one of the Middle Ages, with characteristics many of which were common to Cambridge and the continental universities of the same day.

Source material has been extensively drawn upon in making this survey. Thanks to the activities of the Oxford Historical Society, a tremendous mass of records has become available to the student in recent times. That organization, founded in 1884 “for the publication of literature illustrative of the history of the university and city of Oxford, and of the neighboring country,”¹ has to date issued seventy-one volumes falling within this scope, the last to appear, bearing the nominal date of 1917, having been issued in 1920.

In addition, volumes useful for our purpose will be found in the series *The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages*, publication of which began in 1857 by authority of the British Treasury, under direction of the Master of Rolls, and was regularly continued up to 1896.

Both sets are exceedingly well-done. Each individual work was written, compiled or edited by an authority given sufficient time to present a finished product of permanent value.

No attempt has been made to exhaust the material available in the two series named, exigencies of time forbidding this. Instead, several volumes have been carefully selected as being the best from the point of view of presenting varied pictures of academic life during Oxford's medieval period, and these have been thoroughly exploited.

*Munimenta Academica*² contains documents on the subject ranging from the early thirteenth to the middle of the fifteenth centuries.

Epistolae Academicae Oxon,³ largely a collection of letters, gives clear impressions of the university in the fourteen hundreds.

¹*The Objects and Work of the Oxford Historical Society* (Oxford, 1900), p. 5.

²Number 50 of the *Chronicles and Memorials Series* (1868).

³Vols. XXXV and XXXVI of the *Oxford Historical Series* (1898).

Only one volume of *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*⁴ has appeared to date. In this are found records of privileges, letters patent, statutes concerning the university and title deeds to university property dating from the Middle Ages. *Collectanea, First Series*⁵ contains, among other things, an account of the fourteenth century Stamford Schism. This was the chief material of a secondary nature employed.

With few exceptions, as about fifty letters in English in the *Epistolae Academicae Oxon* and scattering documents, such as writs in French, in the *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, the source material is in Latin, the language of medieval western universities. Digests in English are, however, provided in many cases, thus making the volumes available for use by those without knowledge of this language of another day.

L. J. R.

The University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia.
18 January 1922.

⁴ Vol. LXX of the *Oxford Historical Series* (1920).

⁵ Vol. V of the *Oxford Historical Series* (1885).

OFFICIALS AND THE HALLS AND COLLEGES

Legend states that there was already a university in the borough of Oxford in pre-Conquest days but this tale is given no credence today.¹ Just how Oxford came to be an educational center is not clear. It is certain, however, that at the opening of the thirteenth century, the university was already in existence. Like in other early seats of learning, halls about the town were engaged by masters who conducted them as private ventures. Religious orders also gave instruction. The schools, thus, had become numerous and rivalries keen. To bring order out of chaos, the university as such was constituted before 1200.

A Chancellor, elected by a Regent Master of each faculty and an equal number of Masters of Arts,² became the chief official. His term was set at two years.³ At first, no such election was valid until it had been confirmed by the diocesan, but after 1368 this requirement was abolished.⁴ At the outset, the office automatically became vacant if its incumbent was absent from Oxford continuously for over a month except when called away on university affairs.⁵ In the fifteenth century this regulation was fundamentally altered, the obligation as to residence being removed⁶ while the term of office was changed to life tenure.⁷

The resident Chancellors had been men of low estate who had personally attended to the duties of their office. Under the new order, absentees of high position, such as the Bishop of Lincoln and the Archbishop of Canterbury, were named to the post.⁸ The Vice-Chancellor, previously serving merely in a temporary capacity during absences, now regularly performed the actual work.⁹

The Chancellor's person was inviolate and those laying hands upon him were forthwith banished from the realm.¹⁰ He likewise enjoyed the valued right of carrying weapons within the precinct, a circuit of twelve miles about the halls.¹¹

¹ James Parker, *The Early History of Oxford, 727-1100* (Oxford, 1885), pp. 4-62.

² *Munimenta Academica Oxon*, edited by the Reverend Henry Anstey (2 vols., Oxford, 1868).

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 107, 229.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 127.

⁶ *Epistolae Academicae Oxon*, edited by the Reverend Henry Anstey (2 vols., Oxford, 1898), II, pp. 531, 629; *Munimenta*, pp. 742, 743.

⁷ *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, edited by H. F. Salter (in progress, Oxford, 1920-?), I, p. VI.

⁸ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 531, 629.

⁹ *Mediaeval Archives*, I, p. vi.

¹⁰ *Munimenta*, I, p. 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 355; II, p. 540.

Upon assuming leadership of the university, a new executive long bound himself to be diligent in punishing the rebellious and in upholding the institution's privileges,¹² which will be considered shortly. Later non-resident, titular heads were at times, at least, excused from taking this oath.¹³ To symbolize his leadership, the "insignia" were bestowed upon the Chancellor at the ceremony attending his induction into office. These were a box containing the statutes of the university, "fastened with a silver clasp"; a silver seal with a chain of the same metal "weighing three and one-half ounces"; a silver cup with a cover, standing on three lions of silver gilt and "weighing thirty-three ounces"; three standard measures for grain¹⁴; four for liquids; Troy weights for use with bread and money; Lyggyny ones for spices and candles; two pair of scales for the greater and lesser weights, "with a wooden box" to hold them; a gilt measure "with a case of green leather" for use with cloth; an iron seal "of the shape of the head of an ox" to mark wooden measures¹⁵; another of the same form to mark earthenware vessels and bakers' weights; an anvil and hammer of iron; and two sheets containing copies of papal bulls against heresies.¹⁶

The Chancellor's activities were many and varied. His legal functions, embracing what were in many respects his most important duties, will be discussed elsewhere.¹⁷ He issued letters of safe conduct to all persons in any way connected with the institution¹⁸; only menials engaged in his presence were recognized as enjoying the privileges of the university¹⁹; he kept on file a list of all persons under his jurisdiction as executive officer²⁰; and lent solemnity to university gatherings by his presence.²¹ He and the proctors drew up and kept on hand a list of disturbers of the peace²² and took joint charge of the university revenue²³ and the accounts.²⁴ He could also excommunicate.²⁵

¹² *Munimenta*, I, pp. 309, 310.

¹³ *Epistolae*, II, p. 629.

¹⁴ These and the other standards of weight and measure mentioned were employed in his capacity as joint holder of the assize and assay of weights and measures with the mayor. See Chapter III.

¹⁵ As being of Standard content, doubtless.

¹⁶ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 283-285.

¹⁷ See Chapter III.

¹⁸ *Munimenta*, II, p. 724.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 686.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 279.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 300.

²² *Ibid.*, I, p. 317.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 500.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 378.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 113-116.

Proctors were chosen annually in congregation, were not eligible for re-election²⁶ and were assisted by helpers known as proproctors.²⁷ They were required to be in residence at the university throughout their entire tenure of office.²⁸ Their work was wholly supervisory—they saw to it that attendance rules were enforced, that the university's privileges were guarded, that the requirements for graduation were fulfilled and that the masters performed their duties.²⁹ They might suspend the latter³⁰ and had full power to impeach the Chancellor.³¹ As noted above, they shared with him responsibility for the maintenance of order and control of the institution's finances.

The Beadles were minor officials chosen by the same procedure as the Chancellor.³² They held office for one year and might be re-elected indefinitely.³³ They made summonses for scholars at their request, published the university's proclamations³⁴ and represented it at student funerals.³⁵ They were not permitted to ask for fees nor could they carry away anything from masters' graduation feasts.³⁶ Upon securing their degree, however, the latter were required to present the beadles with twenty shillings and with a pair of buckskin gloves each, or, in lieu of the latter, an additional five shillings was to be divided among these worthies.³⁷

Oxford was under the protection of the Papacy from the thirteenth century on³⁸ and of the king as well commencing with the reign of Edward IV. In earlier times, some high noble or churchmen had served as intermediary when the university was dealing with the Crown.³⁹ The value which the institution placed on the ruler's ready support is seen by the flattering and verbally highly ornate letters sent sovereigns upon their accession.⁴⁰

Royalty at times made capital of its position by putting forth candidates to fill vacancies, as that of beadle.⁴¹ One favorite was presented by the queen with the request that the university

²⁶ *Munimenta*, I, p. 81; II, p. 486.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 109, 157, 318, 319.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 108.

³² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 321-326; II, p. 494.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 496.

³⁴ Examples are given in succeeding pages.

³⁵ *Munimenta*, II, p. 495.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 495.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 324.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 26-29.

³⁹ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 339, 387, 400, 424.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 489, 495, 500.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 524, 603, 604.

authorities show "unto him, in anythynge that may be for his wele and profite among you, your good favour and benevolence."⁴² On another occasion, following the death of Henry Mochegood, beadle of divinity, Prince Arthur urged one John Stanley for the position⁴³ while the king and queen recommended John Preton⁴⁴ and the Queen Mother, Rychard Wotton.⁴⁵ Such conflicting nominations were dangerous since any arrangement made might very readily lead to the university losing the favour of some members of the reigning family. In this case, after careful consideration, it was decided to accept the Queen Mother's candidate as she had recently established a chair in theology.⁴⁶ Even before the king had become protector, beadles had been removed from office upon his complaining of misconduct on their part.⁴⁷ This was done, of course, to gain good standing with the Crown.

In 1247, the introduction of the collegiate system by Walter Merton inaugurated a series of changes which gradually and fundamentally altered conditions of life for Oxford students and masters alike. We have seen that it had been customary for lecturers to rent halls about the town and to there gather groups of students about them. Such quarters were, however, poorly arranged for academic work. Furthermore, there was constant moving from one location to another which interrupted study and prevented the growth of traditions, always powerful forces in any center of learning.

Merton now purchased a property, established a permanent college, endowed it, provided for its government and devised regulations applicable to scholars resident there.

They were to be admitted by election; were to be chaste, well-conducted, peaceable, humble and poor; were to have capacity for study; were to be desirous of improvement; were to wear uniforms; were to eat at a common table; were to receive incomes of fifty shillings per annum each; scholarships were subject to forfeiture upon neglect of duty; and expulsion from the collegiate body was provided for in the case of members found guilty of grave crimes or outrages. A warden was to be in general charge of the college's affairs, a dean was to be chosen for every twenty students and an older individual in each chamber was to be charged with keeping the young ones in order and at their tasks.⁴⁸

⁴² *Epistolae*, II, p. 594.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 666.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 665, 666.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 667, 668.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 645, 646, 668.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 349.

⁴⁸ George C. Brodrick, *Memorials of Merton College* (Oxford, 1885), pp. 5-8.

Many other colleges, clustering about Merton, appeared in the course of the next two centuries. This innovation, revolutionizing housing conditions, the composition of the student body and methods of instruction, materially strengthened the position of the university. With colleges in permanent quarters and in one locality, the masters could be held in closer check than had been possible when they had been in charge of rented halls, scattered promiscuously about the city. The latter did not, however, disappear until near the close of our period, and their passing was not without regret to contemporaries.⁴⁹

During the hall period, the university had sought to gain in importance at the expense of the scattered establishments by extending gradually increasing control over them. Aid had been given in finding accommodations for masters and scholars. Thus, in 1303, the mayor and bailiff of Oxford had been requested to lease to students all houses that could be spared,⁵⁰ while an agreement had been reached that persons occupying dwellings once used for scholastic purposes should surrender them to masters who might wish to lecture there.⁵¹ Hall-keepers had been forbidden under pain of loss of privilege (q.v.) for a year and a fine of forty shillings to receive scholars expelled from other establishments, a ruling made necessary by the fact that undesirables had found it possible to remain at Oxford by the simple expedient of gaining admission to another group after having been forced out of one.⁵² Because some principals of halls had not punished their charges for misdemeanors committed, fearing financial loss thereby,⁵³ all had come to be held strictly accountable for the enforcement of rules and had likewise been forbidden to leave the city without naming substitutes vested with full authority.⁵⁴ Much had been accomplished, then, in bringing the halls under supervision, but at best, only loose direction had been maintained and students residing in private homes had been wholly outside university jurisdiction.

Now, by order of King Henry V, from 1421 on, students were required to live in either halls or colleges and rooming with townsmen was strictly prohibited.⁵⁵ Consequently more than sixty halls were occupied in 1462.⁵⁶ But such was the growth of colleges

⁴⁹ John Richard Green and George Roberson, *Studies in Oxford History* (Oxford, 1901), p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 81.

⁵¹ *Munimenta*, I, p. 314.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, p. 252.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 309.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 359, 360.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 277-279.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 687.

that forty years later there were not a fifth of that number.⁵⁷ This, then, was the period in which the collegiate system practically replaced that of the halls and ultimately all of the latter closed. Whereas few undergraduates had previously lived in colleges, it now became the normal thing for them to do so and the university, which closely regulated such groups, became a living force in the community. Due, however, to the fact that the colleges owned properties, had extensive endowments and separate groups of officials, unification was never effected and the university's absolute supremacy was never established. The result has been Oxford as we know it—a group of colleges whose activities are co-ordinated by a central power, the university.

⁵⁷ The halls of the late fifteenth century were distinguished from the typically medieval ones in that they were in reality miniature colleges, in quite permanent quarters, and not infrequently had chapels attached.

II

THE POVERTY OF MEDIEVAL OXFORD

The University of Oxford held little property during its medieval period. In the thirteenth century, some ten houses within the city were transferred to it but no more gifts of real-estate were received until 1479 when Wulstan Hall, which was of small value, passed into its possession. This may be explained by the fact that philanthropically inclined individuals tended to establish colleges under university jurisdiction, after the example of Walter Merton, rather than to endow the university proper. Such land and buildings as were owned by the latter were, for the most part, not used for academic purposes but were, rather, made a source of revenue, being rented out.¹

The church of St. Mary the Virgin was long the only structure used by the university itself² and it was not until near the close of the fifteenth century that a second was occupied. This was a school of divinity, the erection of which began about 1450,³ and which was financed at the outset by a gift of 500 marks from the estate of the late Cardinal Beaufort. But that amount proved inadequate⁴ and aid was sought from the king, graduates of the university, friends of the institution and executors of estates in order that it might be completed.⁵

Response was both immediate and generous.⁶ Building material⁷ and money were received from a considerable number of persons. The most noteworthy cash gift was 1,000 marks from Thomas Kempe, Bishop of London, two hundred being paid down and a similar amount being pledged annually until the total should have been covered.⁸ The grateful Chancellor and masters bound themselves and their successors to annually celebrate mass for the repose of the souls of the donor and his late uncle, sometime cardinal bishop and Archbishop of Canterbury.⁹

One of the properities owned by the university and yielding four marks rent annually¹⁰ fell into such wretched state at about the same time that it could scarcely longer be called a building¹¹—

¹ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 275; *Epistolae*, I, pp. 219, 221.

² *Epistolae*, II, p. 417.

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 322.

⁴ *Munimenta*, II, p. 573; *Epistolae*, I, pp. 266, 315, 333.

⁵ *Epistolae*, I, pp. 275, 276, 323, 324, 326, 327; II, p. 390.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 368.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 321.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 439. Payments were actually received as follows: the sum of 200 m. in 1479 (p. 451), a similar amount in 1480 (p. 453), another in 1481 (p. 471), 100 m. late in 1481 and the balance in 1482 (p. 474).

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 439.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 542.

the foundations were all but beyond repair¹² and the walls were so weak that a strong wind was likely to raze the entire structure. Assistance was therefore also sought in rebuilding it¹³ and after this had been done, it was used to house the school of canon law.¹⁴

All of the university's business and all of its "solemn acts," such as the granting of degrees and the inception of masters (q.v.)¹⁵ had, "from old time," been performed in St. Mary's Church.¹⁶ By the third quarter of the fifteenth century it, too, was in the last stages of ruin. The leaden roof was so thin as to afford little more protection against the rain than a sieve.¹⁷ Many persons were afraid to enter it and those who did so took their lives in their own hands.¹⁸ The parishioners were poor and university finances were inadequate, hence recourse was once more had to appealing to graduates and friends for contributions, any sum being held acceptable.¹⁹ One gift of £200, from Richard Lichfeld, doctor of laws, was among these received.²⁰ The king on his part gave forty oaks.²¹

The last part of the fifteenth century was, then, a time of building. In 1481, it was reported to the bishop of London whose generosity had done so much to make the second university building possible, that the workmen were "industrious as bees; some carry stones, others polish them; some carve out the statues, others place them in their niches."²² The Bishop of Winchester was asked to loan machines which he had used in recent construction work.²³ Labourers were at one time withdrawn by order of the king who required their services on his own projects,²⁴ but by 1490 the school of divinity had been completed, that of canon law had been repaired, and work on St. Mary's, which it had been decided to rebuild entirely, was well under way.²⁵

The university, throughout its early history, suffered from chronic poverty, that "stepmother of learning."²⁶ The situation was especially bad in the first half of the fifteenth century, when the nation had become impoverished through the wearying Hun-

¹² *Epistolae*, II, pp. 480, 481.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 377.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 571.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 537.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 508.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 417, 508, 509.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 417, 536, 566.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 417, 531-534, 569.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 357.

²¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 525.

²² *Ibid.*, II, p. 470.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 432, 433.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 445, 446.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 570, 571, 590, 598.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 106.

dred Years War. There were then but a thousand students in attendance²⁷; the masters' minds were never free from economic worries²⁸; learned men languished from general want.²⁹ To provide reward for intellectual labours, the Archbishop of Canterbury was requested to grant benefices to graduates. The naming of ignorant and unlettered men to them, while those who strove for an education could find no reward when they had completed their studies, was held to be undermining learning.³⁰

When the university was invited to send representatives to the Council of Basle to aid in the refutation of prevailing heresies, the invitation could not be accepted because of the lack of wherewithal to creditably equip the delegation and to provide for its maintenance abroad.³¹ Later, when Pope Eugenius ordered the institution to send a group of its most learned scholars, the Archbishop of Canterbury was appealed to for pecuniary aid.³²

Various gifts were gratefully received from time to time. Among these may be mentioned "beautiful silken vestments embroidered with gold,"³³ the right of nomination to certain benefices,³⁴ annual pensions,³⁵ and sums of money.³⁶ The individual colleges were endowed with land by the king³⁷ and with the right of advowson for given churches by certain laymen.³⁸ This provided for the support of members of the collegiate group and offered them positions upon graduation. On one occasion, a Queen Mother of her own volition established and endowed a university chair of theology,³⁹ as already noted. The king relieved the university from the payment of taxes raised for the conduct of war and, late in the fifteenth century, exempted it from the payment of tenths and fifteenths as well.⁴⁰

Books were received from a number of patrons and, being the working material for advanced study, they were always welcome, the more so since their cost was frequently too high for the university to purchase them. In the middle of the four-

²⁷ *Epistolae*, I, p. 154.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 136.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 154, 155.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 72.

³² *Ibid.*, I, p. 153.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 313.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 371.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 399.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 421, 526, 638.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 287-294.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 219, 221.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 645, 646. It was because of her having done this that her candidate, rather than the king's and queen's or Prince Arthur's was made beadle of divinity, as related in Chapter I.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 644, 645

teenth century, the library was located in a room above the congregation house.⁴¹ The books were chained in convenient order so that students might use them readily during open hours. A century later, a professional librarian was in charge.⁴² Certain books received at that time were sold for £40 which provided an annual income of 60 sh. for the librarian. Others of lesser value were purchased to replace the volumes sold.⁴³

The Duke of Gloucester proved a most generous donor in this respect. To encourage the study of the liberal arts and philosophy, he gave no less than £1,000 worth of books to the university.⁴⁴ In 1439, a total of 129 volumes were received,⁴⁵ the next year seven more and, in 1443, another lot of 130.⁴⁶ The extravagant thanks heaped upon the Duke, whose offerings were called the most memorable made in the history of the institution, and the ordering of perpetual mass to be said for the repose of his soul and for that of the Duchess, his wife, bear witness to the value attached to it from an education point of view.⁴⁷

A new register was ordered made in which to catalogue the Gloucester gift. No volumes nor any sheets from any were to be sold, given, exchanged, loaned for copying purposes or removed from the library for repair save that when the Duke wished to use any he might freely do so. The collection was kept in a chest in the library and was available only to masters lecturing on the arts and philosophy and to the principals of halls. Each book was to be priced at a figure considerably above its real value and, in case of loss, this sum was to be paid by the loser so that the copy might be replaced.⁴⁸

In his last days, the Duke promised to give still other volumes but, unhappily, he died before this had been done. His executors failed to make his word good,⁴⁹ hence parliament and the Crown were appealed to for aid in securing them⁵⁰ and certain persons near the king's ear were requested to use their influence in spurring him to activity.⁵¹ The collection was, however, dispersed,

⁴¹ A part of St. Mary's.
and the books fell into private hands unconnected with the university, where they appear to have remained.⁵²

⁴¹ A part of St. Mary's.

⁴² *Epistolae*, I, pp. 227, 228. See Chapter V.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 227, 228.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 184.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 179.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 232.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 177, 244.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 187-190.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 296-298.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 251, 300, 301.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 253, 258-261.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 285, 286, 318.

Profiting by this experience, the university in 1470 requested the Archbishop of York to give his aid in immediately securing the books valued at 500 marks left to it by the late Earl of Worcester, since delay in such cases was "notoriously dangerous."⁵³

Richard Lichfeld, who had given £200 for the restoration of St. Mary's, also presented the university with 128 books.⁵⁴ Another lot of 142 volumes was received from an individual who seems to have been the Archdeacon of Middlesex.⁵⁵ Persons of means and administrators of estates were appealed to for donations of this nature.⁵⁶ Not only persons of high estate responded. In the middle of the fifteenth century, the offer of a copy of Josephus' *Antiquities*, from one Thomas Knollez, a London grocer, was gratefully accepted. He also sent an unnamed second work which was likewise appreciatively received.⁵⁷ Records of other gifts of books, ranging from a single copy to thirty-one, from persons of various estate, have been preserved.⁵⁸

The donors of books, in common with other benefactors of the university, were honoured by an annual procession and by the celebration of special masses, at which all who attended received an indulgence of twenty days from the papal legate.⁵⁹

Thus, medieval Oxford held little property and much of what it did own was merely used as a source of revenue. Its lands and buildings had for the most part been given to it at an early period; after the institution of the collegiate system, the endowment of individual colleges rather than of the university as such became customary.

The result was that the revenue of the university was small and that gifts from individuals were called for whenever an unusual project was contemplated. Gifts of books, too, were very much appreciated. Obviously, the work of the institution must have been seriously hampered by the lack of funds.

⁵³ *Epistolae*, II, p. 389.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 357.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 559.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 281.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 222, 229.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 279, 309, 326; II, pp. 373, 382, 482, 483, 532, 533, 544, 545.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 32; II, p. 448.

III PRIVILEGES OF THE UNIVERSITY

Oxford was an ecclesiastical corporation and to enable persons affiliated with it to pursue their work in peace, they were privileged from early times. Thus, in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, the following were already stated to be rights held "from time immemorial" though they had actually been confirmed only during the reign of Henry III.

No master or scholar could be obliged to appear before any court except that of the Chancellor; the proving of testaments of students who had died at the university fell within the jurisdiction of that official and the proctors; and the Regent Master had the right of judicial inquiry into excesses committed by all scholars, parish priests and laymen who were members of the university.¹ The Papacy recognized these privileges granted by the Crown and similarly exempted the university from all ecclesiastical authority, that of the archbishop, for example.²

In general, persons connected with Oxford in any way were held to enjoy special status. Such individuals and their peculiar rights were specifically named in agreements concluded between university officials and city authorities at various times, as in 1290 and in 1498. They were the Chancellor, all doctors, masters, bachelors, undergraduates, the families of students, their servants, and university employees.³ The privileges held by these persons were many and were effective in the university precinct, that is, in the region within twelve miles of the Latin Quarter.⁴

The Chancellor was given power to banish for ten miles.⁵ He enjoyed jurisdiction in all cases concerning privileged persons, could summon the parties to such a dispute before him, and had authority to pass judgment upon or excommunicate them.⁶ Court might be conducted in any language commonly understood,⁷ decisions were to be arrived at promptly,⁸ the Chancellor was not obliged to inform the accused who had preferred charges against him⁹ and compurgation was allowed where he saw fit.¹⁰

Appeals from his court could be made to the whole university.¹¹ An aggrieved party might make further appeal to the Pope, but

¹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 41, 42.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 79.

³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 46-56; *Epistolae*, II, pp. 343-345.

⁴ *Munimenta*, II, p. 540.

⁵ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 247.

⁶ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 364, 365.

⁷ *Munimenta*, I, p. 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 260.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 537.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 536, 625, 700.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 74.

in the interim he was required to submit to the decision which he sought to have reversed.¹² The Chancellor also settled disputes in which persons named arbiters (q.v.) failed to agree.¹³

Privileged individuals were frequently cited to appear before other courts but were not obliged to obey such summons.¹⁴ Those having recourse to any court save the Chancellor's were held to be guilty of perjury, they having thus violated the oath to abide by the regime of exemptions, taken upon admission to the university body, and became liable to degradation, expulsion, excommunication and imprisonment.¹⁵

The problem of precisely who was privileged, agreements between the university and town notwithstanding, was complicated by the fact that many "having the appearance of scholars" lurked about the city in taverns and brothels, murdering and robbing.¹⁶ Furthermore, ill-tempered persons not infrequently became scholars' servants so as to enjoy a peculiar status with respect to their enemies.¹⁷

University privileges were vigorously upheld in matters other than that of jurisdiction. At times, ridiculous lengths were gone to to preserve them in pristine purity. Thus, in 1325, the mayor of Oxford caused the city pillory to be moved from its accustomed place. The university had authority in this matter and, while it would ordinarily have agreed to the change, now refused to accept it and the Chancellor excommunicated the city official as a matter of discipline. Subsequently the new location was approved, but the pillory was set six feet from where the mayor had seen fit to locate it, thus vindicating the rights of the institution.¹⁸

Goods of suicides within the precinct were claimed by the Chancellor and proctors, to be applied to pious uses.¹⁹

Only the Chancellor, the proctors, their servants and the king's officers were permitted to carry weapons within the university zone in time of peace. Students coming to or going from Oxford, were, however, permitted to bear arms to protect themselves against attack en route.²⁰

The Chancellor and mayor from early times held the assize and assay of bread and beer jointly. In the middle of the fourteenth century, an agreement was reached whereby they also held

¹² *Munimenta*, II, p. 461.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 550-551.

¹⁴ *Epistolae*, I, pp. 157-162, 176, 193, 215, 268, 269; II, pp. 378, 379, 444, 503, 539, 631, 633, 675.

¹⁵ *Munimenta*, II, p. 669; *Epistolae*, II, p. 403.

¹⁶ *Munimenta*, II, p. 563; *Epistolae*, I, pp. 320, 321.

¹⁷ *Epistolae*, II, p. 548.

¹⁸ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 113-116.

¹⁹ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 660, 661, 664.

²⁰ *Munimenta*, I, p. 355.

those of weights and measures in common.²¹ In acknowledgment of being such joint custodian, the Chancellor made annual payment of a penny to the Crown.²² One hundred shillings a year out of the executive's share of the fines paid by offending merchants went to the king, one-half of the balance was paid into the university treasury and the remainder went into his own pocket.²³ It was in connection with this feature of his work that an incoming Chancellor received among other insignia of office, the measures for liquid and grain, the sets of weights, measures for cloth and the iron seals, already spoken of.²⁴

While anyone might engage in any branch of trade in the town,²⁵ close supervision was kept over all. Thus, by letters patent of 1330, the price of wine was set at not over half a pence a gallon above the London price²⁶; if the proper charge were exceeded, the tavern could be closed.²⁷

The price of bread was regulated on a sliding scale according to the market value of wheat. It was not to be raised or lowered unless a rise or fall of six pence a quarter of grain had taken place. Short-weight loaves were punishable by fine and imprisonment in the pillory or by banishment if the accused refused to appear when cited. Baked products were to be trademarked; no baker was permitted to make both white and dark bread. On the other hand, to protect them, bread could be baked at inns only for use there. The sale of adulterated flour was punishable by exposure in the pillory, a fine and banishment from the city.²⁸

Tavern keepers were obliged to take an oath that they would brew only wholesome beer and that they would allow it to settle and cool before offering it for sale.²⁹ Retailers of the beverage were ordered to offer their product in all parts of town by circulating through the streets with it and to sell as large quantities as customers might desire, under penalty of a forty shilling fine.³⁰ On one occasion, an Alice Everarde was suspended from the trade for refusing to deal with thirsty students.³¹ The price of beer was to remain stationary unless that of malt varied twelve pence a quarter, in which event the drink was to be raised or lowered

²¹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 159-164

²² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 457, 458.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 187, 188.

²⁴ In Chapter I. See *Munimenta*, I, pp. 283-285.

²⁵ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 160.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁷ *Munimenta*, I, p. 183.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 181, 182, 183; II, pp. 517, 615, 695, 696.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 541, 695.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 506-508.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 523.

a farthing a gallon in accordance with the trend of the market for that ingredient.³²

The sale of bad meat was prohibited, as was the buying of flesh from Jews and reselling it to Christians. Imprisonment and fines were employed to make those rulings effective.³³

Inspections of shops were regularly made to determine whether purveyors of foodstuffs were maintaining standards which had been set. On one such occasion in 1449 it was found that the bakers were making bad bread and that they gave the townsmen thirteen units to a dozen while the students received but twelve; that the beer sold was weak and unwholesome; that tradesmen recently fined refused to serve students and principals; that certain individuals enjoyed a monopoly on the sale of sea-food and were profiteering; and that others were doing the same with respect to fresh water fish.³⁴

Clothiers, too, were subject to rigorous supervision. Tailors were ordered to cut academic dress according to ancient custom, allowing sufficient length of robe for masters and beadles. Offenders in either respect were to be imprisoned.³⁵ Prices on robes were set.³⁶ Upon complaint of the tailors' guild that petty shopkeepers in the suburbs, within the university precinct, were selling clothing at rates yielding profits equal to their own without contributing to the support of the guild, which retained a chaplain approved by university officials, the Chancellor granted members of the organization the exclusive right of operating in the university zone. Dealers violating this regulation were to be hailed before the Chancellor's court and fines levied upon them were to be divided between the guild and the university. The ruling was not, however, to prevent poor students from making their own clothing.³⁷

Members of the university were not permitted to practice medicine unless licensed. Because many illiterate persons without degrees had set themselves up as physicians, unqualified practitioners were made subject to laws governing disturbers of the peace and were punished accordingly.³⁸

Certain booksellers were named stationers to the university. Others were, however, engaged in catering to the students. As a means of preventing the removal of valuable works from Oxford, a law was passed whereby only the official stationers

³² *Munimenta*, I, p. 183.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 183; II, p. 543.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 588.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 382.

³⁷ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 594, 595.

³⁸ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 236, 237.

might legally sell volumes worth over half a mark each under penalty of fine, imprisonment and the abjuring of trade within the university precinct.³⁹

Thanks to the numerous privileges which had been granted, the university was able to largely prevent interference with its activities in any respect. It was, virtually, a separate governmental unit within the city and even played a large part in local affairs, having jurisdiction in all cases in which one party was a student and enjoying joint control with the mayor over resident merchants. It would have been singular indeed had student-townsmen clashes not occurred, for the existence of two sets of rights within a given region almost inevitably leads to difficulties of a most serious nature.

³⁹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 233-234.

IV

TOWN AND GOWN RELATIONS

The privileges held by Oxford officials, masters, students and their servants led to endless strife between university and town authorities. The latter maintained that the Chancellor unlawfully set free prisoners who had been arrested by the mayor; that he appropriated to himself forfeited victuals and fines to the injury of the fee farm at Oxford; that he released laymen from prison only upon payment of ruinous sums; that exemption from the ordinary process of law was unduly extended to tailors, barbers, writers, parchment makers and their families; that he required persons to lease their houses to scholars for at least ten year periods, with rents being set every five years; that he summoned persons before him at unreasonable times and without giving due notice; that he deprived soldiers passing through Oxford of armour and trappings to secure satisfaction for their scholar-creditors on account of debts contracted elsewhere; and that when a layman was wounded by a clerk, the Chancellor secured possession of the latter's person before it could be ascertained whether the victim was still alive or dead.

Deputies for the university and others for the town appeared before the king and parliament in 1290, each pressing charges and airing grievances. A settlement was at length effected whereby all claims and counter ones were dropped; the jurisdiction of the Chancellor was carefully defined; forfeited victuals were to be given to the Hospital of St. John outside the East Gate; fines for laymen were to be reasonable; and only clerks and their families, the beadles, parchment makers, illuminators, writers, barbers and tailors were to enjoy the privileges of the university. Houses could thereafter be rented for any period though rates were to be set every five years as in the past; citizens were to have a day's notice to appear before the Chancellor; soldiers' possessions were to be seized only for debts contracted at Oxford; and clerks who had wounded residents of the borough were to be held until the full extent of the injuries inflicted was known.¹

Already in 1214, the townsmen and gownsmen had come to blows, the former hanging certain scholars for misdemeanors committed. Most of the university people promptly fled the city and a general migration impended, but such concessions were at length made by the citizens, whose incomes were to a large extent derived from the students, that the authorities were persuaded to return. The townsmen agreed to remit half the rent to scholars for ten years, to give 52 sh. for the use of poor clerks and to

¹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 46-56.

feast a hundred of them annually as well as to sell provisions at just and reasonable rates in the future. In addition, the particular persons concerned in this outrage were obliged to come shoeless, hatless and cloakless to the graves of the victims and there perform public penance.²

A considerable conflict breaking out in February, 1298, created a tense situation. A group of scholars assaulted a city bailiff during a dispute and stole his mace, the emblem of office. They were arrested but were rescued by friends who likewise entered the home of the chief bailiff and would have slain him had he not been so fortunate as to escape.

On the next day the students gathered at St. Mary's and, organizing, beat up all townsmen on whom they could lay hands. The Chancellor refused to arrest them or to allow city authorities to do so. Municipal guards stationed about Oxford were attacked by clerks in large numbers. The latter then fled to their quarters, into which the bailiffs broke and arrested three. The Chancellor demanded their release, but without success.

About two thousand students next opened a mass assault on the town, freely sacking homes and shops. Many were wounded and one was killed in the melee which followed and the leaders were at length arrested. The Chancellor appeared on the scene at that stage of the fray, ordered the clerks to their lodgings and vainly sought to effect the release of those who had been incarcerated. His demand for the keys to the city gates so that the students might flee into the country if attacked was likewise refused, whereupon the latter, coming to a realization of the precariousness of their position, broke down one of them.³

The matter was finally settled by a board of arbitration, one member of whom was the Bishop of Lincoln. The townsmen recognized the liberties of the university, prisoners were freed, two bailiffs were removed from office, certain obnoxious persons were denied continued dealings with the university and others were ordered out of the city.⁴ Though the students seem to have been the aggressors here, victory clearly lay with them.

A still more violent conflict, the famous St. Scholastica's town and gown war, occurred in February, 1354. In this, the townsmen were triumphant. Several students were killed and most of their quarters were pillaged.⁵ The university suspended operations,⁶ an interdict was laid upon the townsmen by the Bishop of

² *Munimenta*, I, pp. 1-3.

³ *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 45-47.

⁴ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 67, 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 190.

⁶ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 151.

Lincoln⁷ and it was not until mid-summer, on writ of the king,⁸ that the Chancellor and mayor arrived at an understanding.

The residents of Oxford bound themselves and their successors to pay 100 marks to the university each year, this sum to be delivered at St. Mary's Church on the anniversary of the contest. The interdict was lifted upon condition that the mayor, bailiffs and sixty of the most prominent citizens would annually attend a memorial mass at St. Mary's and offer one penny each at the high altar. Of the total sum given, 40 d. was to be distributed among poor students and the balance was to go to the incumbent of the church.⁹

This settlement was ratified by the king, the university was once more taken under his protection,¹⁰ its privileges were renewed and extended¹¹ and lectures were again begun. The annual payment was subsequently remitted but the requirement of attendance at the specified memorial mass was continued.¹² It was, however, necessary to pass an ordinance requiring students to abstain from violence towards citizens coming to St. Mary's on St. Scholastica's day in fulfillment of their obligations.¹³

Another conflict, a four day battle, occurred in 1364 and the townsmen again triumphed. Once more a total cessation of studies occurred; this time, too, an interdict was laid against the city.¹⁴

Wrangling between university and city authorities was more or less continual. Three-quarters of a century after the clash just mentioned, "lamentable dissensions . . . which are a sign of the wrath of the Almighty," were rife. Three points were in dispute—the turning over to university officials of all privileged persons arrested in the city and put into prison under accusation of felony or treason; the privileges claimed by university people in suits between or against any of them; and proper punishment for assault or the drawing of weapons by persons not permitted to carry them.

To emphasize the gravity of the situation, a sacred procession was held, the Chancellor leading and being followed by the doctors, two by two in the rank of their several faculties. After them came the masters of art and the bachelors of theology, in pairs, the whole number praying silently.¹⁵ A statute was also passed to

⁷ *Munimenta*, I, p. 190.

⁸ *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 157.

⁹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 190-202; *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 158-160.

¹⁰ *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 148, 149; *Munimenta*, I, p. 200.

¹¹ *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 152-157.

¹² *Munimenta*, I, p. 202; *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 170, 171. The annual payment of one penny per person in attendance at service was not abolished until 1825.

¹³ *Munimenta*, II, pp. 463, 464.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 417.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 326.

prevent the "malice and cunning of the townsmen" from destroying the university.¹⁶

At length, in 1460, a full agreement similar to that of 1290 was entered into. Under it, city authorities were to surrender arrested persons upon demand by university officials if this demand were made within four weeks of their incarceration. Prisoners were to be tried before the Chancellor within twelve weeks and their goods and chattels were meanwhile to be kept in safe-keeping. If an accused townsman was found guilty, his possessions were to be delivered to the mayor as "pertheyning to the feeferme of the said towne."

These and no others were to enjoy the privileges of the university—the Chancellor; the doctors, masters and other graduates; the undergraduates dwelling within the precinct, no matter "of what condition, order, or degree they may be"; every regular servant to any of the above; temporary ones while within the school zone; and free men of the university with all their households.

Scholars or their servants selling goods were to pay the customary tax to city officials. The status of arrested persons claiming privilege was to be carefully determined before they were released. If two individuals, one of whom was privileged, broke the peace, the case was to go before the Chancellor. If two townsmen or foreigners, or a foreigner and a citizen of Oxford broke the peace, the mayor was to have sole jurisdiction.¹⁷

Following this understanding, comparative peace reigned for the rest of our period.

It was the anomalous position of university people, in the city yet not subject to its laws, and the fact that the university legally had the right to interfere in many municipal affairs, which led to the town and gown contests, among the most colourful episodes of life at medieval Oxford. Attempts were made to settle points at issue by common agreement but, while this certainly did much to ease the situation, relations between the two elements were in no sense ever really cordial.

¹⁶ *Munimenta*, I, p. 118.

¹⁷ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 343-345.

V

ACADEMIC LIFE

Scholars in residence at Oxford were "clerks" and were therefore tonsured. All social classes were represented in the student body. Persons of high estate, such as the Duke of Suffolk's heir¹ and Lord Edward Pole, nephew of the king,² were eagerly recruited by university officials. Because persons of rank feared to send their children to Oxford lest they be induced to join some monastic order, the friars were forbidden, under penalty of losing the privilege of attendance which members of their groups enjoyed, to attempt to win any person under eighteen to their ranks, or to assist in the abduction of likely youths.³

The poor students, however, predominated. They were not infrequently granted written authority to beg for alms.⁴ It was they who received a portion of the St. Scholastica's day offering from the citizens attending mass at St. Mary's; money was also distributed among them and one hundred of their number were banquetted annually in accordance with the terms of the settlement following the affair of 1214.⁵

Various loan-funds known as "chests" were established by pious persons for the benefit of indigent students.⁶ "Of all works of charity, that of relieving the necessities of poor scholars is the greatest, enabling them to acquire virtue and science for the confirmation of the true faith," declared officials of the institution in writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury and requesting his assistance in establishing a new fund.⁷

The regulations covering the making of loans varied in details, but the ordinance for the Chichele Chest may be taken as typical. In 1432, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave 200 marks to be used for this purpose. Three custodians empowered to handle the sum were to be elected annually. The university might borrow 100 sh. and any college except St. Mary of Winchester, five marks. A master of arts engaged in study might borrow 40 sh., a licentiate two and a half marks, a bachelor two and a scholar one. No second loan was to be made to any corporation or individual until the first had been repaid.

A pledge exceeding in value the sum borrowed had, in every case, to be deposited before a loan was made. Unredeemed ones were to be sold in thirteen months as a means of satisfying the

¹ *Epistolae*, II, p. 453.

² *Ibid.*, II, pp. 454, 455.

³ *Mumimenta*, I, p. 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 684.

⁵ See Chapter IV.

⁶ *Mumimenta*, I, pp. 66, 82-85, 338; *Epistolae*, I, p. 205; II, p. 593.

⁷ *Epistolae*, I, p. 74.

debts. Such as were offered for sale were not to be lent out on approval except under careful restrictions and upon sufficient security.

The guardians were required to inspect the chest every month and to render accounting upon expiration of their terms of office. Records of transactions, giving names and particulars, were to be kept and audited at that time. Misuse or embezzlement of funds involved excommunication.

The founder of the chest was reckoned among the benefactors of the university and his name was to be specially mentioned when prayers for such were offered while mass for the repose of his soul was to be said annually. All borrowers were furthermore to repeat the "Pater Noster" and "Ave Marie" five times in behalf of the founder and all faithful departed.⁸

Guardians of chests who failed to render the periodic accounting were summoned before the Chancellor's court. If they did not clear themselves, they stood "perjured, deprived of degrees, and banished." When, for any reason whatsoever, deficits occurred, the custodians were required to cover them.⁹ In one case where a chest was robbed, the guardians were admitted to compurgation to clear themselves from any suspicion of complicity in the crime.¹⁰ Unclaimed pledges were regularly placed on sale upon expiration of the time limit after having been priced by a body of masters and a stationer.¹¹

Secular graduates were required to wear proper academic dress within the university precinct. The costumes for the several groups, seasons and special occasions were all carefully specified. Only masters of art, the licentiates of any faculty, persons of noble or royal blood, sons of members of parliament and those with private incomes over 60 marks annually might wear fur on their hoods. We have already noted the regulations covering the tailoring of these.¹² Silk robes in lieu of woolen ones were to be worn from Easter to All-Saints' Day.¹³ Masters of theology were required to wear lamb's wool on their capes.¹⁴ Distinguished visitors always appeared in cap and gown. The Bishop of Lincoln at one time was in the vicinity of Oxford but, because the servant bearing his robes had taken another route, he did not call, holding it to be unseemly to appear in his riding costume.¹⁵

⁸ *Epistolae*, I, pp. 83-89.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 364, 449, 450, 474.

¹⁰ *Munimenta*, II, p. 750.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 255.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 301, 360, 361; II, pp. 393, 421, 428-430, 434, 448, 450, 457, 478. See Chapter III.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 283.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 393.

¹⁵ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 512, 513.

Latin was, of course, the tongue employed in university work. Since that was the "language most generally understood," beadles were required to use it in making official announcements.¹⁶

Regular and punctual attendance at classes was required under pain of excommunication.¹⁷ It eventually became quite easy to enforce this regulation since, after the first quarter of the fifteenth century, as we have seen,¹⁸ scholars were required to be under the government of some "sufficient" principal and could no longer dwell promiscuously about town.

Servants might be and frequently were engaged. They, too, were entitled to the privileges of the university under agreement with city authorities. One man servant in the middle of the fifteenth century received an annual wage of 49 sh. and a gown.¹⁹ Every attendant in a hall was required to swear to the principal that he would not purchase victuals for resale.²⁰ Carriers travelled into various parts of the country from time to time, gathering money, clothing, books and similar items at the homes of students upon order.²¹

In the latter part of our period, at least, lectures in the seven sciences and the three philosophies were always going on in some of the colleges.²² Regent Masters wishing to give instruction in those subjects were divided into ten groups of equal size, according to seniority. The masters in any division, as grammar, the most elementary one, employed only books specified by statute. The text was first read. It was then explained and next, passages were chosen from it and points for discussion were raised from these.²³ Disputations were proclaimed by the beadle, with mention of the thesis, at least a day in advance.²⁴ Ones in grammar were held every Thursday.²⁵

Scholars were required to pay twelve pence a year for lectures in logic and eighteen for the course in physics. All masters except those of noble origin were required to accept payment for their services lest the ones dependent upon fees for a livelihood lose all of their students to free lecturers and thus suffer hardship.²⁶ Collections for the doctors and masters of the several faculties were periodically made among the resident learners.²⁷

¹⁶ *Munimenta*, I, p. 283.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 426, 427.

¹⁸ See Chapter I.

¹⁹ *Munimenta*, II, p. 578.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 468, 469.

²¹ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 611, 657.

²² *Munimenta*, I, pp. 272-274.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 288.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 288.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 86, 87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 128, 129.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 256, 257.

Upon graduation, students were required to give twenty shillings to the beadles, to be divided among them, and a pair of buckskin gloves to each, or, in lieu of the latter, another five shillings was to be paid to the group as a whole.²⁸ Every graduate was likewise obliged to present clothing to one of the stationers.²⁹

A minimum of four years of study led to the bachelor's degree.³⁰ Logic, mathematics and grammar were required subjects.³¹ Among the works studied were Boethius, Priscian, Donatus and Aristotle.³² The degree was granted after the candidate had "determined," that is, had successfully argued some disputed question or thesis, thus giving evidence of having profitably employed his time as well as of fitness for advanced courses leading to a mastership.

The number of determining bachelors was, at times, so great that the masters' quarters were all occupied and students were obliged to undergo the ordeal in private buildings, where proper attendance was impossible. This was thought to reflect upon the university and it was consequently ruled that determining must be done only in the structures along School Street, in the heart of the student quarters. Shifts were to be employed if the number of candidates was large. In any event, they were examined for seven days each, from nine to twelve, and from one to five.³³

Aspirants for the baccalaureate degree appeared before four elected Regents in Art³⁴ with the testimony of former masters in their favour. Only those fit as to learning, morals, age and stature³⁵ were given an opportunity to display their powers. They took an oath that they had passed through the necessary forms and studies in logic, mathematics and grammar. Disputations were held daily save on Saturday when questions were taken up.

The masters corrected errors and interrupted candidates who were employing irrelevant arguments. Determiners were permitted to present robes to such of the masters before whom they appeared whose incomes from benefices did not exceed twenty marks and who were not their own teachers or relatives. Wining and dining all of them was also held to be proper.³⁶

²⁸ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 324, 325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 410.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 242, 243.

³² *Ibid.*, I, p. 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 239-241.

³⁴ To insure fairness to scholars, no matter where they come from. The North and South students were always at outs and were at times even deadly enemies. See Chapter VI.

³⁵ A statute of 1357 required that persons presented to opponency in theology must, among other things, to be of "proper stature." *Munimenta*, I, p. 204. Later, it was ruled that any question arising on this score must be settled by the congregation. *Munimenta*, II, p. 454.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 241-247.

Early in the fifteenth century the work prescribed for determiners was held to be too burdensome and less rigorous requirements were put into effect.³⁷

The master's degree was qualified for through inception which occurred not more than a year after a candidate had become a licentiate³⁸ upon testimony of his masters that he would be in a position to attain the higher rank within this time limit.³⁹ A student had normally spent eight years on the seven liberal arts and the three philosophies before gaining this more advanced status.⁴⁰ Masters of art had studied grammar for one year, rhetoric for three terms of thirty reading days each, logic for three terms, arithmetic for a year, music for the same length of time, geometry for two terms, astronomy for two and natural philosophy, moral philosophy and metaphysics for three terms each.⁴¹

This work satisfactorily completed, the scholar proved his worth in disputation, participating at least twice.⁴² Such matches of learning were gala occasions regularly attended by the masters of the several colleges upon special invitation of the participants and by large numbers of bachelors as well, with the dress worn minutely regulated.⁴³ Successful candidates were required to feast the Regent Masters on inception day or otherwise to forfeit sums determined by their estate and income.⁴⁴

Occasionally, students finding themselves disqualified through lack of ability or indolence attempted to secure degrees by having influential persons bring pressure to bear on university officials in their behalf, with the result that individuals seeking such dispensations were held to be incapable of receiving diplomas of any grade.⁴⁵

Graduation time seems to have been one of wild revelry, disorder and violence and at banquets, more annoyance than pleasure was commonly experienced by host and guests alike. A statute was consequently passed forbidding the halting and detention of masters or their domestics going to or from such a feast, permitting only university servants or the inceptor himself to enter the banquet hall until the guests had arrived and requiring seating at table in the order of rank. "Noone shall beat the doors, tables, or roof, or throw stones or other missiles so as to disturb the

³⁷ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 260, 261.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 377.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 313; II, p. 449. Becoming a licentiate was not unlike taking a preliminary Ph.D. examination today.

⁴⁰ That is, he had done four years of graduate work. At one time, however, but three seem to have been required. See *Munimenta*, II, p. 416.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 286.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II, p. 416.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 430-435.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 353, 354.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 206, 332, 333.

guests, under pain of imprisonment, excommunication, and a fine of twelve pence."⁴⁶

In 1229, by letters patent, an invitation was extended to the University of Paris to migrate to Oxford following town and gown disputes in the French metropolis.⁴⁷ This was not accepted, presumably because of the liberal terms of settlement offered by the Parisians. Relations between the two institutions cannot, however, on the whole, have been very cordial, for inceptors were required to swear that they would recognize only Oxford and Cambridge as universities⁴⁸ and masters from the University of Paris were not permitted to read at the former.⁴⁹ The trouble seems to have been that the French refused to deal with the English on a basis of equality in the matter of granting degrees.⁵⁰

Oxford graduates were also required to swear that they would never lecture at Stamford.⁵¹ This was an echo of the schism of 1333-1334. Stamford, an ecclesiastical center, bade fair early in the fourteenth century to become the seat of a university rivalling Oxford and Cambridge. In 1333, the north English students at Oxford battled those from southern districts and, upon meeting defeat, moved en masse to Stamford and sought the king's permission to continue in residence there.

Edward III ordered them to desist but they set his orders at naught. A royal agent and the sheriff of Lincoln subsequently ejected the rebels in 1335, but citizens of Stamford persuaded many to return. The property of those who did so—seventeen masters, six parish priests and fourteen undergraduates—was thereupon confiscated to the Crown. A counter-part to this struggle was meanwhile going on at Oxford, where complete anarchy reigned between the northern and southern students. The disorder was finally put down with a show of force after Cambridge sided with its great rival, and their educational monopoly was strengthened.⁵²

Bachelors in theology and masters of art took precedence on the occasion of events such as a procession.⁵³ Public sermons were preached in St. Mary's every Sunday morning during the scholastic year. They were delivered by bachelors or doctors of theology in turn and two months time was given for preparation. With something like poetic justice, anyone who should have

⁴⁶ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 308, 309.

⁴⁷ *Mediaeval Archives*, pp. 17, 18.

⁴⁸ *Munimenta*, II, p. 375.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 446.

⁵⁰ *Epistolae*, I, p. 322.

⁵¹ *Munimenta*, II, p. 375.

⁵² H. H. Henson, "The Stamford Schism," in *Collectanea, First Series* (Oxford, 1885), p. 3. See Chapter VI for North and South frays.

⁵³ *Munimenta*, I, p. 233.

notified a given individual that he was slated to speak but had failed to do so in time was himself obliged to preach instead.⁵⁴

Masters were required to keep their seats at university assemblies and to speak only in turn, abstaining at all times from abuse or intemperate language.⁵⁵

Heresy was carefully guarded against. The use of Ovid's *de Arte Amandi* in the grammar courses was strictly forbidden.⁵⁶ Wyclif's and Pecok's works were burned.⁵⁷ The teaching, defending or maintaining of doctrines condemned by church councils, as that of London held in 1411, was forbidden and the decisions of such gatherings were kept on file so as to be readily accessible to all.⁵⁸

Inceptors were required to take an oath not to support heresy of any kind and not to uphold the teachings of William Russell.⁵⁹ "Degenerate sons of the university," travelling about the country declaring that Christ begged from door to door, a statement recently condemned by the Papacy, were served with summons to appear before the Chancellor for trial on the charge of disseminating unorthodox views.⁶⁰ One Friar John who maintained that tithes belonged to the mendicant brothers more justly than to the rectors of churches and that the king had the right to deprive ecclesiastics of this temporalities, was forced to retract both statements and was subjected to a heavy fine in addition.⁶¹ The conduct of masters accused of heresy was carefully investigated.⁶²

Pestilence raged at Oxford in 1486 and in 1500, resulting in many fatalities.⁶³ The Black Death of a century and a half before must have taken a large toll since the university lay on a much-travelled highway.

Certain of the regulations covering behavior afford intimate pictures of student life during medieval days. At the close of the thirteenth century, the scholars in William of Durham's college were required to speak Latin and were forbidden to fight, to sing smutty songs, to tell off-colour tales or to ridicule each other.⁶⁴ Gatherings to celebrate national holidays were forbidden, as was dancing in churches or on porches by persons disguised in masks and decorated with flowers and leaves.⁶⁵ We

⁵⁴ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 290-292.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 312.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 441.

⁵⁷ *Epistolae*, II, pp. 411, 412.

⁵⁸ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 267-270.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 374-376.

⁶⁰ *Epistolae*, II, p. 485.

⁶¹ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 208-211.

⁶² *Epistolae*, II, p. 415.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 508, 509, 662.

⁶⁴ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 56-61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 18.

have already seen that the carrying of arms was not permitted.

Students were likewise forbidden to frequent disorderly houses and annual inquisitions were conducted by the Chancellor to discover scholars doing so and those entertaining prostitutes in their own chambers or practicing self-abuse.⁶⁶

Disturbers of the peace who refused to go to prison were *ipso facto* banished as were individuals breaking from jail while serving sentence.⁶⁷

A chaplain had charge of the library. He was elected in congregation for a term of one year and might be re-elected so long as he remained fit in morals and fidelity and performed his duties properly. He was to be paid 100 sh. annually from the assizes of bread and beer, besides receiving his customary fee of 6 sh. 8 d. for celebrating masses. All beneficed students were, furthermore, to present him with robes upon graduation and he was to have a month of vacation annually.

To prevent books from being worn out and to maintain the proper atmosphere of decorum for serious study, only advanced students were regularly admitted and visitors were rigorously excluded. Scholars were required to wear the robes of their degree when in the library and all users of books were obliged to take an oath that they would handle them properly, making no erasures or blots.

The library doors were open from nine to eleven and from one to four except on Sundays and on days when university masses were said. If the Chancellor or some distinguished person not connected with the institution wished to use the books, they might do so at any time from sunrise to sunset. A list of works available, with the names of the donors, was posted.⁶⁸

The meeting and free mingling of all classes at Oxford resulted in the growth of better feeling between persons of various estate and, while rank was by no means forgotten, scholastic achievement was frankly recognized as the true basis for judging worth.

The education given was substantial, covering well the fields of contemporary interest. Degrees were granted on the basis of work accomplished; favoritism had little play. Students were kept at their work and high standards of conduct, which the great majority doubtless lived up to, were placed before them. Many regulations covering the granting of degrees were substantially like those of our own day, affording clear evidence of the very close connection between the medieval and the modern university.

⁶⁶ *Munimenta*, I, pp. 16, 17, 24, 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp 261-268.

VI MISDEMEANORS

While gownsmen formed a unit in their relations with townsmen, serious disorders at times broke out among themselves. The most marked of these were the broils between northern and southern students, the former including persons from Wales and Ireland. In the middle of the thirteenth century an affair marked by great turmoil resulted in representatives of both groups meeting in conference and drawing up an agreement to restore order. In the future, from thirty to forty members of each faction were to bind themselves individually not to break the peace and to warn the Chancellor if they heard of trouble brewing.¹

However, in 1274, some twenty years later, the Irish students were driven from Oxford after a battle resulting in fatalities on both sides.² At the opening of the fourteenth century it was ruled that since the division of scholars into these two bodies led to constant disturbance, meetings for the purpose of gaining popular support for individual grievances might no longer be held.³ This did not, however, settle the problem; the Stamford Schism, already discussed, was a north and south war.

Members of the several faculties were also on bad terms with each other. Thus, in 1470, the Archbishop of York was appealed to to settle the "ancient feud" between the doctors of medicine and the doctors of civil law.⁴

Bachelors claiming the title of master were another source of trouble during the fifteenth century. They were so called by their servants and, at public meetings, demanded the honors of that rank notwithstanding the fact that the institution had rendered a decision against their pretensions.⁵ Such was their audacity that they wore masters' hats, "to their own damnation and the ruin of the university."⁶

The carrying of daggers was a common offence. If students found armed were unable to prove that they were beginning or ending a considerable journey at the time they were apprehended, they were jailed or fined and their weapons were confiscated or the revenues from their benefices were sequestered.⁷ Murders and stabbings were the natural results of such carrying of arms.⁸

¹ *Munimenta*, I, p. 20.

² *Mediaeval Archives*, p. 332.

³ *Munimenta*, I, p. 92.

⁴ *Epistolae*, II, p. 383.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 115, 130.

⁶ *Munimenta*, I, p. 360.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 16, 17, 40; II, pp. 505, 510, 527, 633, 682, 717; *Epistolae*, I, p. 91.

⁸ *Munimenta*, II, p. 534, 674; *Epistolae*, II, p. 406.

Half the value of those seized was paid to the Chancellor and the other half went to the university.⁹

Prostitutes thrived about the Latin Quarter. When caught, they were banished, at times after first being pilloried or jailed.¹⁰ Suspected women were forbidden to entertain students.¹¹

In 1432, a schedule of fines was established to cover cases of violence, since they were "more dreaded than anything in the way of punishment." Threats of personal violence were to result in a fine of twelve pence; the carrying of weapons, two shillings; pushing with a shoulder or striking with a fist, four shillings; hitting with a stone or club, six shillings eight pence; doing bodily harm with a knife, dagger, sword or axe, ten shillings; carrying a bow and arrow, twenty shillings; gathering armed men, thirty shillings; resisting the execution of justice or going about at night, forty shillings.¹²

The penalty was to be doubled for the second offence, trebled for the third and quadrupled for the fourth, with banishment as an additional punishment in the graver cases. Persons refusing to give the names of accomplices were to be fined for each such on the above-named basis. One-third of the fines collected were to be paid to the Chancellor, one-third to the university and the other third to the proctors, minus one-twelfth, to which the beadles were entitled.¹³

Difficulties with individual townsmen were numerous. Thus, we find one scholar imprisoned for threatening a tailor. The latter and his servant were, however, later fined for insulting the client during his incarceration.¹⁴ A doctor of canon law gave surety to keep the peace with a taverner, an apothecary and two other citizens.¹⁵ Several residents of Oxford and a student were hailed before the Chancellor on charges of violence, parading the streets after sundown, beating up a tailor and robbery.¹⁶

At one time or another, a servant boy was stolen¹⁷; beer was seized on a main thoroughfare¹⁸; a master gathered armed bands for the purpose of disturbing the peace¹⁹; the mayor of Oxford was in bodily fear of one John Davell²⁰; a native shot at the

⁹ *Munimenta*, II, p. 464.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 533, 538, 539, 660; *Epistolae*, II, 486, 653.

¹¹ *Munimenta*, II, pp. 674, 718.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 303-306.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 315-318.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 525.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 634, 635.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 505.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 506.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 633.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 721.

proctors and was banished²¹; while the partisans of E. Hampden assaulted members of the university whenever they ventured away from their quarters.²²

Even persons of high rank were not secure from assault on the part of gownsmen. In 1238, Cardinal Otto was attacked by a group of them²³ and two centuries later, in 1423, the family of the Earl of Warwick was set upon by rebellious scholars.²⁴ Nor was authority respected, for, in 1462, students broke into the house of John Harris, the beadle, with the intent to murder him.²⁵

Four scholars of the fourteen hundreds were caught trespassing, being on the trail of rabbits and deer.²⁶ On another occasion, two accused of violence and robbery from the person did not appear when cited with the result that their gowns were sequestered and they themselves were banished.²⁷ Two Welsh students stole a horse left with an innkeeper who, unhappily enough, was required to pay the owner forty-six shillings eight pence in three installments.²⁸

The variety of persons enjoying the privileges of the university resulted in queer cases being brought into the Chancellor's court. Thus, Alice Stycol, a scold, was sentenced to imprisonment for her frequent indulgence in tongue lashings,²⁹ while Anisia Lambard was required to give security that she would abstain from further threatening her neighbors.³⁰ Similarly, Agnes Petypace gave bond that she would not beat her servant immoderately in the future³¹ and when Margery Snow, cited for violence and prison breaking, failed to answer the summons, she was banished.³²

When a tailor involved in a stabbing affair fled to Broadgate's Hall for sanctuary, he was pursued and dragged forth by the proctors who took him into custody despite his protestations. He was, however, promised that he would be restored to sanctuary if his life was imperilled and this was subsequently done.³³ When a master threatened with excommunication and his students entered into a conspiracy whereby the latter snatched the docu-

²¹ *Munimenta*, II, p. 576.

²² *Epistolae*, II, pp. 607, 608.

²³ *Munimenta*, I, p. 6.

²⁴ *Epistolae*, I, p. 7.

²⁵ *Munimenta*, II, p. 696.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 669, 670.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 531.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 684, 685.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 548.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 709, 710.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 726.

³² *Ibid.*, II, p. 659.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 702-704.

ment containing the sentence from the priest's hands as it was being read, all concerned were jailed.³⁴

In 1457, a parish priest of St. Mary's was accused of having stolen £100 from the Danvers loan chest.³⁵ Scholars of Devon and Cornwall seized an image of St. Peter in that church and placed it on the high altar at St. Frideswydes, inviting other scholars to attend mass there.³⁶ A master was obliged to retract offensive language used against the commissary before congregation.³⁷ Claims for back-rent were satisfied by confiscating the delinquents' goods and selling them.³⁸

Cases might be settled out of court by litigants agreeing upon an arbiter and submitting their dispute to him. Where this was done, both parties bound themselves to abide by the decision rendered under penalty of heavy forfeiture. Arbiters not infrequently included a reconciliation feast among the terms of settlement.³⁹

In one case, at least, a banished student was refused re-admission upon the specific request of the king, it being held that if his offences were overlooked, others would imitate him.⁴⁰

These cases provide picturesque details in the picture of student life at medieval Oxford, as preserved for us in university records.

³⁴ *Munimenta*, II, pp. 601, 602.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 669.

³⁶ *Epistolae*, I, p. 133.

³⁷ *Munimenta*, II, p. 680.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 555, 627-631.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 712-715, 720.

⁴⁰ *Epistolae*, I, p. 264.

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