A History of the University of Oxford from the Earliest Times to the Year 1530

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ALMÆ MATRI

OXONIENSIS
Edward III granting a charter to the University of Oxford from an Illumination in the Chancellor's Register A.D. 1375
A HISTORY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

FROM THE Earliest TIMES
TO THE YEAR 1530.

BY
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DEPUTY KEEPER OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS.

LONDON:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK.
1886.
THE favourable reception which was given to my "History of Eton College" some years ago has encouraged me to attempt a "History of the University of Oxford." There is a certain affinity between the two subjects, but the second is by far the more important and the more complex.

Few institutions in Europe can boast a higher antiquity than the University of Oxford; few have a wider reputation. Amid the political, religious, and social changes of mediæval and modern times, it has enjoyed a continuous existence of more than six centuries, retaining a great part of its original organisation, and many of its ancient characteristics. It has given to the country a long series of eminent statesmen, churchmen, and scholars; and it has received from successive kings charters investing it with peculiar and important privileges. Various movements affecting the nation at large have had their origin at Oxford, and the affairs of the University have at almost every stage been closely connected with those of the State.

It has been my endeavour to trace the origin and development of the University, and its relations towards the
PREFACE.

authorities claiming civil or ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Oxford in the middle ages. I have therefore recorded at some length the successive incidents of the protracted struggle between the clerks and the townsmen, a struggle which ended in the complete triumph of the academical over the municipal body. "The University," says the late Mr. J. R. Green, "found Oxford a busy, prosperous borough, and reduced it to a cluster of lodging-houses. It found it among the first of English municipalities, and it so utterly crushed its freedom that the recovery of some of the commonest rights of self-government has only been brought about by recent legislation."

The history of the University in the middle ages, indeed, is not that of a body of sequestered students, intent only upon the advancement of learning; it is rather that of a society of men swayed by every current of popular opinion, and often separated from one another by differences of race, of language, of profession, of political sentiment, and of religious conviction. "North against South, Scotch against Irish, both against Welsh, town against gown, academics against monks, nominalist against realist, juniors against seniors, the whole University against the Bishop of the diocese, against the Archbishop of the province, against the Chancellor of its own election, were," as Dean Stanley remarks, "constantly arrayed against one another."

I have in a separate chapter attempted to describe the ancient organisation of the University, illustrating it by numerous references to the contemporary statutes of the Universities of Paris and Cambridge. Without attempting a detailed history of the different Colleges, I have given some account of the foundation of each, prior to the year 1530, with an abstract of the statutes by which it was
originally governed. At the outset, however, I must warn my readers against the common error of supposing that the Colleges formed the component parts of the University to which they were affiliated. As will appear in the following pages, the University was a flourishing institution long before the establishment of the oldest College, and the influence of the Colleges did not become predominant until near the close of the period embraced in this volume. The chapters relating to the Colleges, have, in fact, little bearing upon the general history of the University, and they may almost be regarded as appendices.

Considering how fully M. Hauréau, Mr. Mullinger, and others, have discussed the history of scholastic philosophy, I have not thought it necessary to dwell at great length upon the character of the studies that were pursued in the universities of mediæval Europe. Nor have I entered into minute details concerning the history and topography of the town of Oxford, subjects which will, I hope, ere long receive adequate treatment at the hands of a local antiquary. The plan at the end of the last chapter will perhaps sufficiently indicate the relative positions of the different colleges and religious houses shortly before the general suppression of the latter by Henry VIII. It does not, however, profess to give the form or dimensions of structures that no longer remain, I have in the text briefly noticed the chief academical buildings, but technical accounts of them would be more appropriate in a separate work, for which Mr. J. W. Clark's splendid "Architectural History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge" might well serve as a model.

The authorities upon which this volume is based consist partly of manuscripts preserved in the Public Record Office,
PREFACE.

in the British Museum, and in libraries at Oxford, Lambeth, Paris, and other places, and partly of chronicles and other printed books. Antony Wood's great work on the "History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford" has been constantly before me, though I have rarely had occasion to quote it. Rejecting his and other abstracts as unsatisfactory, I have gone to the original authorities, but I have not hesitated to avail myself of any good transcripts that have been available for my purpose.\(^1\) Frequent references will therefore be found to the manuscript collections of Thomas Smith, of University College, in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries, to Hare's Register of Privileges in the British Museum, and to Bryan Twyne's voluminous collections, preserved among the archives of the University. Untrustworthy as a historian for lack of the faculty of weighing evidence, Twyne was an industrious transcriber, and it was from his manuscripts that Wood obtained most of the materials for the earlier part of his "Annals."

Although fully aware that my work is unworthy of the great subject with which it deals, I may plead that it is the first attempt at a consecutive history of the University. Wood was avowedly an annalist, who recorded events, not always accurately, under particular years, without attempting to classify them, or show their connexion with one another.\(^2\) Subsequent writers have generally taken him

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\(^1\) The references given in brackets indicate the places where transcripts may be found of the documents cited immediately before them.

\(^2\) The discrepancies between the dates given by Wood and those given in this book are, in many cases, due to the fact that he followed the legal year, beginning on the 25th of March, whereas I have uniformly followed the historical year, beginning on the 1st of January.