

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-49443-5 - National Union of Teachers
 Conference: Cambridge Souvenir Easter, 1928
 Cambridge University Press
 Excerpt
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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I. *UNIVERSITAS CANTABRIGIENSIS*

THOSE who have seen in other towns or cities imposing buildings called "The University" will seek in vain to find their like in Cambridge. A University, indeed, there is—the University of Cambridge, or (in older phrase) the Cantabrigian University. And to the yet more ancient town this ancient University has brought its world-wide fame. The University, too, is something else than the group of Colleges, Halls, Hostels, Houses, and other bodies between which its members are, or used to be, divided. Identified with none, at once more and less than all of them together, it has and has ever had in its own right whatever possessions, powers, laws, duties, and authorities have belonged to it—Schools, Senate House, Museums, or other buildings; houses and lands; Statutes and Ordinances; Council, Senate, House of Regents; Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, and Bedells. And, though in age no "University" building can vie with the oldest of the college structures, the University itself is older and greater than any other institution of academic Cambridge. For it dates back to the time when students and teachers gathered in the town were first numerous and considerable enough to receive from Authority recognition as a "Universitas", that is, a body or guild of men bound together, like members of a Merchant or Craft Guild, by common aims and

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interests, and worthy, like them, of rights and privileges established to secure their ends.

The University is, in fact, neither a building nor a group of buildings, neither a single college nor a group of colleges, but the whole body of teachers and students of Cambridge, organised and privileged, under the authority of their Chancellor, for the advancement of sound Religion and Learning.

II. BEGINNINGS

The birth of the University, if the date of that obscure event could be ascertained, would probably be found not far before or after the opening of the thirteenth century. In 1209 some of the riotous students expelled by King John from Oxford came to Cambridge, while others went to Northampton or elsewhere; and perhaps what brought them was the fame of a school or teacher of which history as yet knows nothing, but which kept some still here when the rest went back. At any rate, ever after, if not before, scholars came to Cambridge to be so trained (it is thus that the Bidding Prayer defines the purpose of the University) “that there may never be wanting a succession of just persons, duly qualified for the service of God in Church and State”. But of the justice of scholars and teachers alike Cambridge townfolk were for many centuries very imperfectly convinced.

For the students, coming from England—especially the North and East, from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and possibly from countries yet farther off, and fighting each other, after their kind, as in great battles between “North” and “South,”

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would at any moment join their rival bands to war upon the townsmen in fights whose faint echoes sounded still in “town and gown” combats a generation or two ago. And their seniors from an early date asserted, with the backing of royal officials, privileges and jurisdictions making it impossible for the men of Cambridge to be, as all medieval townsmen would be, masters in their own house. The national interest of learning was supported by Authority against the local interest of town autonomy, even if its more violent defenders could not always claim the King’s countenance. So, though all students were for many generations “Clerks in Holy Orders” in some degree, holiness was perhaps the last characteristic ascribed to them, as a class, by Cambridge townsmen.

More grievous even, perhaps, because more ever-pressing, than the University’s claim to judge cases in which its members were involved, must have been its claim to demand for its members board and housing upon reasonable terms. “Reason” is apt to mean different things to seller and buyer, and no doubt Cambridge bakers and brewers hotly resented the fixing of their prices by persons not even engaged in other trades within the town. And even greater was the townsmen’s wrath when Masters of Arts, with the Chancellor’s sanction, compelled landlords to accept them as tenants, that they might be principals of a “hostel” for the lodging of scholars, or even to promise them the succession to the present occupier. But quarrels on this matter did not endure for ever, for soon, slowly but surely, the college system was built up, and, when the colleges took in not

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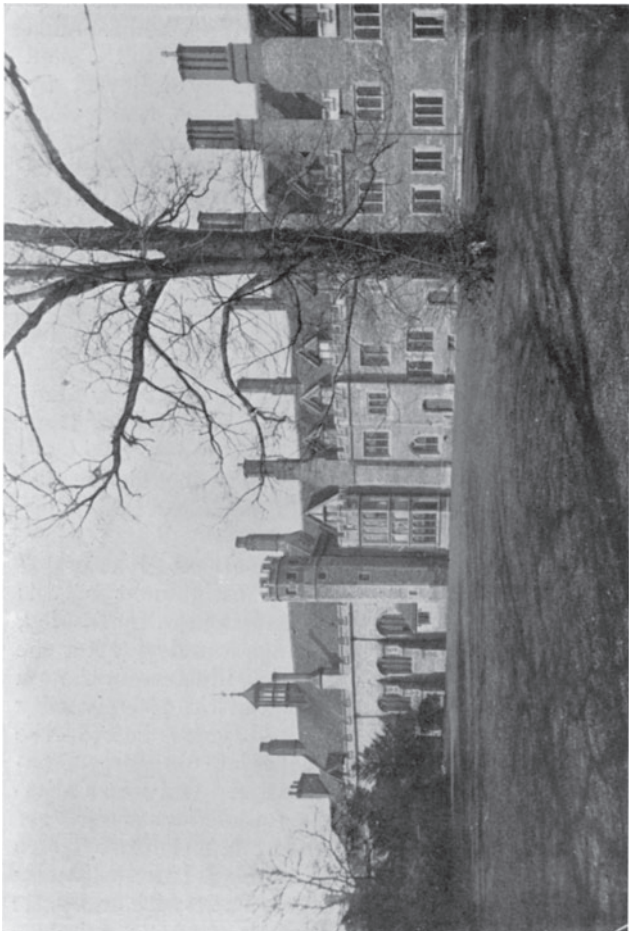
only endowed scholars but “pensioners”, or paying students, the lodging problem faded away, till the vast increase in numbers revived it in a milder form for the nineteenth century.

III. COLLEGES

In many ways the third quarter of the thirteenth century ushers in a time of beginnings, an age of transition from the Middle Ages proper, through the “Later Middle Ages”, to the Modern Age of the Renaissance and the Reformation. And this was so in the English Universities. For the time from Henry III to Edward III forms the first great period of college-making, by the University itself or—a far more common and lasting method—by pious founders and benefactors of all ranks.

At Cambridge in the early days of Edward III the University possessed a “University Hall” and a “University Hostel”. But such town-houses taken over by University authorities were destined to give place to new halls or colleges, built expressly, by royal or private munificence, to accommodate scholars. University Hall was soon swallowed up in the Countess of Clare’s “Clare Hall”, University Hostel in the Countess of Pembroke’s “Pembroke Hall”—two foundations which centuries later preferred to “Hall” the more fashionable style of “College”. And Clare itself had a predecessor in its own kind. For the ancient House of Peter, starting, more than half a century earlier, with two houses endowed by a Bishop of Ely for scholar-clerks he had previously quartered on the Brethren of the Hospital of St

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PETERHOUSE

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John (to their great and mutual dissatisfaction), had soon begun to grow into the new-built college of Peterhouse. Meanwhile a Bishop had founded "Michaelhouse" and a King "King's Hall". And now Pembroke Hall was quickly followed by Trinity Hall, Corpus Christi College, and "Gonville Hall" (our Gonville and Caius College). And Corpus (marvel of marvels!) was actually founded by two Guilds of Cambridge town: perhaps the dreadful horror of the recent Black Death for a time stilled ancient feuds and incited town and gown alike to pious enterprises.

IV. MORE COLLEGES

For nearly another century no great new foundation was established. But the University itself was at last rearing buildings of its own—"Schools", which then included, and are now included in, the University Library; and the planting of "Buckingham House" in Cambridge by Benedictine Monks in 1419 formed a link with the next great period of college-making. For the assignment of this house to his new Magdalene College by Audley, least worthy of all Cambridge founders, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, illustrated, though on a paltry scale, a characteristic of University development for a hundred years before—the conversion to the new collegiate purpose of endowments originally monastic. Only St Catharine's, of all the colleges founded between 1441 and 1546, with the Royal Foundations of King's and Trinity at either end, was neither originally dowered nor afterwards enriched with monastic possessions; Queens', Christ's, and St John's—

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owing much, like Clare and Pembroke, to noble ladies—followed the fashion; and Bishop Alcock grafted Jesus College on to the decaying and deserted nunnery of St Radegund, saving for all time some of the oldest and most beautiful things in college architecture.

King's, sweeping away town dwellings to clear a site that for centuries it could not fill, and marking itself off from the University as an exclusive and privileged corporation, dwelt for centuries apart, a beautiful but haughty stranger, till in the nineteenth century it made a splendid sacrifice to join in friendly fellowship with other foundations. Henry VIII's magnificent college, on the other hand, absorbing Michaelhouse and King's Hall, became in time so famous that not long ago uninstructed foreigners sometimes believed "Trinity, Cambridge" to be another name for the University itself.

Later foundations were few and far between. Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex under Elizabeth witnessed to a real if narrow zeal for the Reformation. In the next two centuries benefactors generally endowed Fellowships or Scholarships, or erected not new colleges but new college buildings. Then came Downing (first occupied in 1821, though planned more than a hundred years before), the only "open" college of its century. Selwyn (1882) was founded solely for members of the Church of England, though with no such narrow exclusiveness as marked the Puritan colleges in their early days. Fitzwilliam House (1887), enrolling now all but a fraction of the so-called "Non-Collegiate Students" (1869), assures to them, with the full sanction and support of the

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University, that corporate, essentially “collegiate”, life without which no man can hope to get the full benefit of a Cambridge career. And still outside the University—though their members may sit on its Boards, lecture in its Schools, examine in its Triposes, and even, in “title”, take its degrees—stand the women’s colleges of Girton (1872) and Newnham (1875).

There the catalogue ends, for the twentieth century has as yet founded no new college, though new college buildings, training colleges for clergy of different churches, and—above all—great University Museums, Laboratories, and Schools have displaced business premises and private houses, and college gardens and grounds.

V. THE INNER LIFE

With these external changes in successive centuries have gone changes also in the inner life of the University.

The medieval students who filled lodgings, hostels, and early colleges, and fought their hosts or foes, were generally either ordained or contemplating ordination, and their studies, though not merely theological, never went beyond the traditional curriculum, with Divinity and Canon Law predominating. But colleges endowed with monastic lands were founded mainly in the age of the Renaissance and the Reformation, when old barriers were breaking down and new worlds coming to light through intellectual as well as geographical exploration; when new studies and doctrines were creeping into Cambridge Schools; when Erasmus read Greek in the new Queens’

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College, or the White Horse Inn (between King's College and the Bull Hotel) was furtively haunted by admirers of Luther; and from the enlarged, enriched, enlightened University sprang a race of men renowned in Tudor and early Stuart days in science or letters, in Church or State.

The Puritan colleges arose in a Cambridge where Dr Caius had to bewail the tearing and cutting to pieces of "all the ornaments" of his college by the Vice-Chancellor himself, "with horrible names and epithets"—where Whitgift, Master of Trinity, deposed the Lady Margaret Reader who helped to write an "Admonition to Parliament" attacking the Prayer Book as "an unperfect book" culled out of a "popish dunghill . . . full of all abominations"—where Dr Cheke of Peterhouse dared to tell the University in Great St Mary's that Satan himself invented bishops, archbishops, metropolitans, patriarchs, and—finally—the Pope.

The long, comparatively changeless period that precluded the strenuous nineteenth century saw a loyally Anglican Cambridge, planted in a sternly Puritan land, pass through the tribulation of Civil War, Commonwealth, and Protectorate to the Happy Restoration, only to find in James II a new oppressor, and turn disgustedly, after his fall, to earn a lasting repute for a new loyalty to Hanoverians and Whigs. And then, despite new Professorships in Science and Mathematics created in the "curious" later Stuart age, with others following in their wake, despite the great figures of Newton, Bentley, Law, and Paley, came the intellectual torpor and moral decline. From this, late in the eighteenth century, new men, new

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causes, new inspirations, new enthusiasts—Pitt, Emancipation, the Evangelical Movement, the hopes of 1789—awoke the sleepers, and the nineteenth century saw a new generation of Cambridge men famous in almost every walk of life.

Then, with Science triumphing in the intellectual world and Democracy advancing in politics, expansion and “Reform” came to the Universities also. By the Statutes of successive Royal Commissions, by her own repeated efforts to put her house in better order, Cambridge grew so transmuted that, but for her ancient buildings, a Cambridge man of the year of Waterloo would hardly have recognised his Alma Mater in the University that sent hundreds and thousands to fight and toil for their country through the Great War, while dull, hard, disheartening work fell to a few left behind, who “kept things going” for the handful of war-time students and prepared for the vast inrush that the peace must bring.

Matriculations are now more than four times as numerous as they were a century ago. There are seven times as many Triposes. To the twenty-two Professors have been added thirty-five more, besides twenty-four Readers, and Lecturers innumerable. The vastly increased expenditure has forced the University to accept an annual Government grant, bringing in its train yet more re-organisation, under new Statutes prepared by yet another Royal Commission. Meanwhile, with brilliant success, the co-operation of both central and local governmental authorities with the University in another direction has given the “poor scholar”—always the special care of University benefactors—opportunities far greater,