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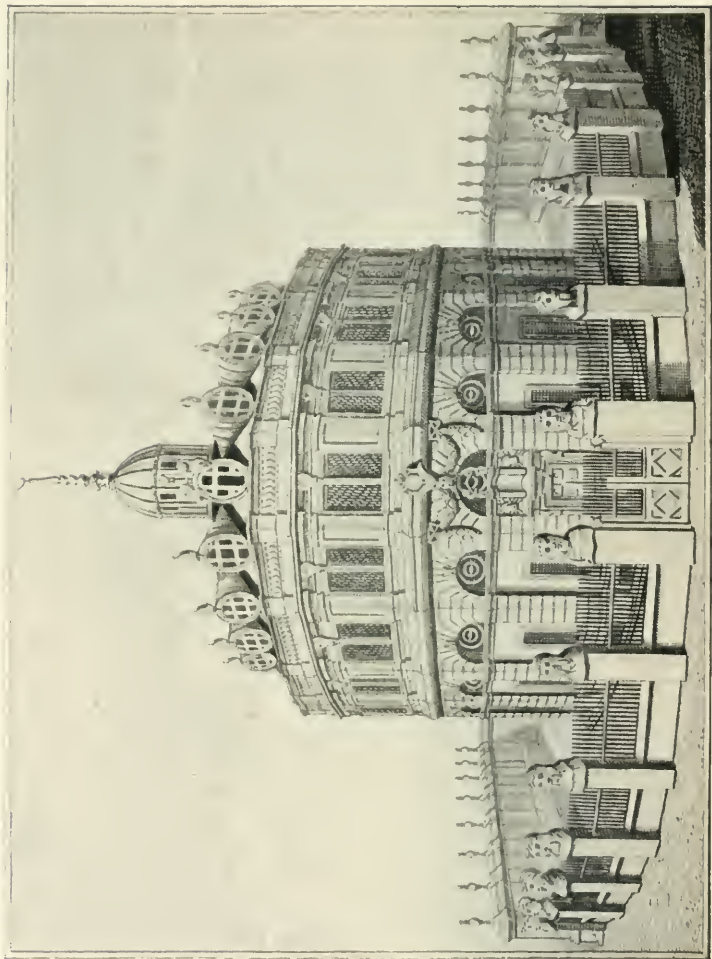
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# The Oxford Degree Ceremony

By

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At the Clarendon Press

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## PREFACE

THE object of this little book is to attempt to set forth the meaning of our forms and ceremonies, and to show how much of University history is involved in them. It naturally makes no pretensions to independent research ; I have simply tried to make popular the results arrived at in Dr. Rashdall's great book on the *Universities of the Middle Ages*, and in the Rev. Andrew Clark's invaluable *Register of the University of Oxford* (published by the Oxford Historical Society). My obligations to these two books will be patent to all who know them ; it has not, however, seemed necessary to give definite references either to these or to Anstey's *Munimenta Academica* (Rolls Series), which also has been constantly used.

I have tried as far as possible to introduce the language of the statutes, whether past or present ; the forms actually used in the degree ceremony itself are given in Latin and translated ; in other cases a rendering has usually been given, but sometimes the original has been retained, when the words

were either technical or such as would be easily understood by all.

The illustrations, with which the Clarendon Press has furnished the book, are its most valuable part. Every Oxford man, who cares for the history of his University, will be glad to have the reproduction of the portrait of the fourteenth-century Chancellor and of the University seal.

I have to thank Dr. Rashdall and the Rev. Andrew Clark for most kindly reading through my chapters, and for several suggestions, and Professor Oman for special help in the Appendix on 'The University Staves'.

J. W.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE DEGREE CEREMONY

THE streets of Oxford are seldom dull in term time, but a stranger who chances to pass through them between the hours of nine and ten on the morning of a degree day, will be struck and perhaps perplexed by their unwonted animation. He will find the quads of the great block of University buildings, which lie between the 'Broad' and the Radcliffe Square, alive with all sorts and conditions of Oxford men, arrayed in every variety of academic dress. Groups of undergraduates stand waiting, some in the short commoner's gown, others in the more dignified gown of the scholar, all wearing the dark coats and white ties usually associated with the 'Schools' and examinations, but with their faces free from the look of anxiety incident to those occasions. Here and there are knots of Bachelors of Arts, in their ampler gowns with fur-lined hoods, some only removed by a brief three years from their undergraduate days, others who have evidently allowed a much longer period to pass before returning

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to bring their academic career to its full and complete end. From every college comes the Dean in his Master's gown and hood, or if he be a Doctor, in the scarlet and grey of one of the new Doctorates, in the dignified scarlet and black of Divinity, or in the bold blending of scarlet and crimson which marks Medicine and Law. College servants, with their arms full of gowns and hoods, will be seen in the background, waiting to assist in the academic robing of their former masters, and to pocket the 'tips' which time-honoured custom prescribes.

Presently, when the hour of ten has struck, the procession of academic dignity may be seen approaching across the Quad, the Vice-Chancellor preceded by his staves as the symbol of authority, the Proctors in their velvet sleeves and miniver hoods, and the Registrar (or Secretary) of the University.

Already most of those concerned are waiting in the room where degrees are to be given: others still lingering outside follow the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors, and the ceremony of conferring degrees begins.

Should our imaginary spectator wish to see the ceremony, he will have no difficulty in gaining admittance to the Sheldonian, even if he have delayed outside till the proceedings have commenced; but if the degrees

are conferred in one of the smaller buildings, it is well to secure a seat beforehand, which can be done through any Master of Arts. The ceremony will well repay a visit, for it is picturesque, it should be dignified, it is sometimes amusing. But it is more than this; in the conferment of University Degrees are preserved formulæ as old as the University itself, and a ritual which, if understood, is full of meaning as to the oldest University history. The formulæ, it is true, are veiled in the obscurity of a learned language, and the ritual is often a mere survival, which at first sight may seem trivial and useless; but those who care for Oxford will wish that every syllable and every form that has come down to us from our ancient past should be retained and understood. It is to explain what is said and what is done on these occasions that this little book is written.

Degrees at Oxford are conferred on days appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, of which notice is now given at the beginning of every term, in the *University Gazette*; the old form of giving notice, however, is still retained, in the tolling of the bell of St. Mary's for the hour preceding the ceremony (9 to 10 a.m.)<sup>1</sup>.

Notice of  
Degree  
Ceremony.

<sup>1</sup> In 1619 a B.A. candidate from Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College), who failed to present him-

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The assembly at which degrees are conferred is the Ancient House of Congregation (p. 93). The old arrangement of the Laudian Statutes is still maintained, by which the proceedings commence with the entrance of the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors, while one of the Bedels 'proclaims in a quiet tone', 'Intretis in Congregationem, magistri, intretis.' The Vice-Chancellor, when he has formally taken his seat, declares the 'cause of this Congregation'. It will be noticed that both the Vice-Chancellor and the two Proctors, as representing the elements of authority in the University (as will be explained later), wear their caps all through the ceremony.

Other busi-  
ness beside  
Degree  
giving.

Degree giving, however, is sometimes preceded and delayed by the confirmation of the lists of examiners who have been 'duly nominated' by the committees appointed for this purpose; it is of course natural that the same body which gives the degree should appoint the examiners, on whose verdicts the degree now mainly depends. A less reasonable cause of delay is the fact that the 'Congregation' is sometimes preceded by a 'Convocation' for the dispatch of general business, as a rule (but not always) of a

self for his 'grace', was excused 'because he had not been able to hear the bell owing to the remoteness of the region and the wind being against him'.

formal character; the two bodies, Convocation and Congregation, are usually made up of the same persons, and are the same in all but name; the change from one to the other is marked by the Vice-Chancellor's descending from his higher seat, with the words 'Dissolvimus hanc Convocationem; fiat Congregatio'.

The degree ceremony itself begins with the declaration on the part of the Registrar that the candidates for the degrees have duly received permissions (*gratiae*) from their Colleges to present themselves, and that their names have been approved by him<sup>1</sup>; he has already certified himself from the University Register that all necessary examinations have been passed, and has been informed officially that all fees have been paid. The names have been already posted outside the door of the House; it is said that this is done to enable a tradesman to find out when any of his young debtors is about to leave Oxford, so that he may protest, if he wish, against the degree. The posting, however, is natural for many reasons, and no such tradesman's

The Registrar's  
Declaration.

<sup>1</sup> Till recently the whole list of candidates for all degrees was read by the Registrar, as well as by the Proctors afterwards when 'supplicating' for the graces of the various sets of candidates. Time is now economized by having the names read once only.

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protest has been known for years; nor is it easy to see how it could be made by any one not himself a member of the University.

The College  
Grace.

The form of the college 'grace' states that the candidate has performed all the University requirements; that for the B.A. may be given as a specimen:—

'I, *A. B.*, Dean of the College *C. D.*, bear witness that *E. F.* of the College *C. D.*, whom I know to have kept bed and board continuously within the University for the whole period required by the statutes for the degree of B.A., according as the statutes require, since he has undergone a public examination and performed all the other requirements of the statutes, except so far as he has been dispensed, has received from his college the grace for the degree of B.A. Under my pledged word to this University.

*A. B.*, Dean of the College *C. D.*'

The words as to residence, that 'bed and board have been kept continuously' are derived immediately from the Laudian statute, but are in fact much older: the other clauses have of course been changed.

Order of  
Degrees.

The various degrees are then taken in the following order:—

Doctor of Divinity.

Doctor of Civil Law or of Medicine.

Bachelor of Divinity.

Master of Surgery.

Bachelor of Civil Law or of Medicine  
(and of Surgery).

Doctor of Letters or of Science.<sup>1</sup>

Master of Arts.

Bachelor of Letters or of Science.

Bachelor of Arts.

Musical degrees.

It sometimes happens, however, that a candidate is taking two degrees at once (i. e. B.A. and M.A.); this 'unusual distinction', as local newspapers admiringly call it, is generally due to the unkindness of examiners who have prolonged the ordinary B.A. course by repeated 'ploughs'. In these cases the lower degree is conferred out of order before the higher.

The same forms are observed in granting all degrees; they are fourfold, and are repeated for each separate degree or set of degrees. Here they are only described once, while minor peculiarities in the granting of each degree are noticed in their place; but it is important to remember that the essentials recur in each admission; this explains the apparently meaningless repetition of the same ceremonies. This repetition was once a much more prominent feature; within

<sup>1</sup> If the Doctor be not an M.A., then his admission to the Doctorate follows the admission of the M.A.s.

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living memory it was necessary for each 'grace' to be taken separately, and the Proctors 'walked' for each candidate. Degree ceremonies in those days went on to an interminable length, although the number graduating was only half what it is now.

(1) The  
*Supplicat.*

The first form is the appeal to the House for the degree. One of the Proctors reads out the *supplicat*, i. e. the petition of the candidate or candidates to be allowed to graduate; this is the duty of the Senior Proctor in the case of the M.A.s, of the Junior Proctor in the case of the B.A.s; for the higher degrees, e. g. the Doctorate, either Proctor may 'supplicate'.

The form of the *supplicat* is the same, with necessary variations, in all cases; that for the M.A. may be given as a specimen:—

'*Supplicat venerabili Congregationi Doctorum et Magistrorum regentium E. F. Baccalaureus facultatis Artium e collegio C. qui complevit omnia quae per statuta requiruntur, (nisi quatenus cum eo dispensatum fuerit) ut haec sufficient quo admittatur ad incipiendum in eadem facultate.*'

(*E. F. of C. College, Bachelor of Arts, who has completed all the requirements of the statutes (except so far as he has been excused), asks of the venerable Congregation of Doctors and Regent Masters that these things may*

suffice for his admission to incept in the same faculty.’)

This form is at least as old as the sixteenth century, and probably much older; but in its original form it set forth more precisely what the candidate had done for his degree (cf. cap. ii). After each *supplicat* has been read by the Proctor, he with his colleague walks half-way down the House; this is in theory a formal taking of the votes of the M.A.s present. When the Proctors have returned to their seats, the one of them who has read the *supplicat*, lifting his cap (his colleague imitating him in this), declares ‘the graces (or grace) to have been granted’ (‘Hae gratiae concessae sunt et sic pronuntiamus concessas’). The Proctors’ walk is the most curious feature of the degree ceremony; it always excites surprise and sometimes laughter. It should, however, be maintained with the utmost respect; for it is the clear and visible assertion of the democratic character of the University; it implies that every qualified M.A. has a right to be consulted as to the admission of others to the position which he himself has attained.

But popular imagination has invented a meaning for it, which certainly was not contemplated in its institution; it is currently believed that the Proctors walk in order to

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give any Oxford tradesman the opportunity of 'plucking' their gown and protesting against the degree of a defaulting candidate. 'Verdant Green'<sup>1</sup> was told that this was the origin of the ominous 'pluck', which for centuries was a word of terror in Oxford; in the last half-century, it has been superseded by the more familiar 'plough'. There is a tradition that such a protest has actually been made within living memory and certainly it was threatened quite recently; a well-known Oxford coach (now dead) informed the Proctors that he intended in this way to prevent the degree of a pupil who had passed his examinations, but had not paid his coach's fee. The defaulter, in this case, failed to present himself for the degree, and so the 'plucking' did not take place.

<sup>1</sup> *Verdant Green* was published in 1853, and this is the oldest literary evidence for the connexion of 'plucking' and the Proctorial walk. The earliest mention of 'plucking' at Oxford is Hearne's bitter entry (May, 1713) about his enemy, the then Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Lancaster of Queen's—'Dr. Lancaster, when Bachelor of Arts, was plucked for his declamation.' But it is most unlikely that so good a Tory as Hearne would have used a slang phrase, unless it had become well established by long usage. 'Pluck', in the sense of causing to fail, is not unfrequently found in English eighteenth century literature, without any relation to a university; the metaphor from 'plucking' a bird is an obvious one, and may be compared to the German use of 'rupfen'.

The second part of the ceremony is the presentation of the candidates to the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors; this is done in the case of the higher degrees, Divinity, Medicine, &c., by the Professor at the head of the faculty<sup>1</sup>, in the case of the M.A.s and B.A.s by the representative of the college.

(2) The Presentation.

The candidates are placed on the right hand of the presenter, who with 'a proper bow' ('debita reverentia') to the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors, presents them with the form appropriate to the degree they are seeking; that for the M.A. is as follows:—

'Insignissime Vice-Cancellarie, vosque egregii Procuratores, praesento vobis hunc Baccalaureum in facultate Artium, ut admittatur ad incipiendum in eadem facultate.'

('Most eminent Vice-Chancellor, and excellent Proctors, I present this B.A. to you for admission to incept in the faculty of Arts.')

The old custom was that the presenter should grasp the hand of each candidate and present him separately; some senior members of the University still hold the

<sup>1</sup> The old principle is that no one should be presented except by a member of the University who has a degree as high or higher than that sought; this is unfortunately neglected in our own days, when an ordinary M.A., merely because he is a professor, is appointed by statute to present for the degree of D.Litt. or D.Sc.

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hand of one of their candidates, though the custom of separate presentation has been abolished; there was an intermediate stage fifty years ago, when the number of those who could be presented at once was limited to five; each of them held a finger or a thumb of the presenter's right hand.

(3) The  
Proctorial  
Charge.

The third part of the ceremony is the charge which is delivered, usually by the Junior Proctor, to the candidates for the degree. Each receives a copy of the New Testament from the Bedel, on which to take his oath. The charge to all candidates for a doctorate or for the M.A. is:—

*‘Vos dabit is fidem ad observandum statuta, privilegia, consuetudines et libertates istius Universitatis. Item quod quum admissi fueritis in domum Congregationis et in domum Convocationis, in iisdem bene et fideliter, ad honorem et profectum Universitatis, vos geretis. Et specialiter quod in negotiis quae ad gratias et gradus spectant non impedietis dignos, nec indignos promovebitis. Item quod in electionibus habendis unum tantum semel et non amplius in singulis scrutiniis scribetis et nominabit is; et quod neminem nominabit is nisi quem habilem et idoneum certo sciveritis vel firmiter crederitis.’*

(‘You will swear to observe the statutes, privileges, customs and liberties of your University. Also when you have been admitted

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 13

to Congregation and to Convocation, you will behave in them loyally and faithfully to the honour and profit of the University. And especially in matters concerning graces and degrees, you will not oppose those who are fit or support the unfit. Also in elections you will write down and nominate one only and no more at each vote ; and you will nominate no one but a man whom you know for certain or surely believe to be fit and proper.’)

To this the candidates answer ‘*Do fidem*’.

The charge to candidates for the B.A. or other lower degrees is much simpler :—

‘*Vos tenemini ad observandum omnia statuta, privilegia, consuetudines, et libertates istius Universitatis, quatenus ad vos spectent*’ (as far as they concern you).

This charge, which is of course the first part of the charge to M.A.s, goes back to the very beginnings of University ceremonial ; the latter part of the charge to M.A.s is modern, and takes the place of the more elaborate oaths of the Laudian and of still earlier statutes. By these a candidate bound himself not to recognize any other place in England except Cambridge as a ‘university’, and especially that he ‘would not give or listen to lectures in Stamford as in a university’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This delightful piece of English conservatism was only removed from the statutes in 1827. It refers to

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There was also a special direction that each candidate should within a fortnight obtain the dress proper for his degree, in order that 'he might be able by it to do honour to our mother the University, in processions and in all other University business'. It is a great pity that this latter part of the old statutes was ever omitted.

The candidates for a degree in Divinity, whether Bachelors or Doctors, are charged by the Senior Proctor; the senior of them makes the following declaration, taken from the thirty-sixth canon of the Church of England (as revised and confirmed in 1865):

'I, *A. B.*, do solemnly make the following declaration. I assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and to the Book of Common Prayer and of the ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons, and I believe the doctrine of the United Church of England and Ireland, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God.'

The Senior Proctor then says to the other candidates:—

'Eandem declarationem quam praestitit *A. B.*

the foundation of a university at Stamford in 1334 by the northern scholars who conceived themselves to have been ill-treated at Oxford; the attempt was crushed at once, but only by the exercise of royal authority.

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 15

in persona sua, vos praestabitis in personis vestris, et quilibet vestrum in persona sua.'

(‘The declaration which *A. B.* has made on his part, you will make on your part, together and severally.’)

When the candidates have duly taken the oath, the last and most important part of the ceremony is performed.

(4) The Admission by the Vice-Chancellor.

The candidates for any Doctorate, except the new ‘Research’ ones, or for the M.A., kneel before the Vice-Chancellor; the Doctors are taken separately according to their faculties, then the M.A.s in successive groups of four each; the Vice-Chancellor, as he admits them, touches them each on the head with the New Testament, while he repeats the following form:—

‘Ad honorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et ad profectum sacrosanctae matris ecclesiae et studii, ego auctoritate mea et totius Universitatis do tibi (*vel* vobis) licentiam incipiendi in facultate Artium (*vel* facultate Chirurgiae, Medicinae, Juris, S. Theologiae) legendi, disputandi, et caetera omnia faciendi quae ad statum Doctoris (*vel* Magistri) in eadem facultate pertinent, cum ea completa sint quae per statuta requiruntur; in nomine Domini, Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.’

(‘For the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the profit of our holy mother, the

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Church, and of learning, I, in virtue of my own authority and that of the whole University, give you permission to incept in the Faculty of Arts (or of Surgery, &c.), of reading, disputing, and performing all the other duties which belong to the position of a Doctor (or Master) in that same faculty, when the requirements of the statutes have been complied with, in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.'

This venerable form goes back (p. 26) to the beginning of the fifteenth century, and is probably much older; the only change in it is the omission at the beginning of 'et Beatae Mariae Virginis'. Modern toleration has provided a modified form for use in cases of candidates for whom the full form is theologically inappropriate, but this is rarely used.

Change of  
Gowns.

The ceremony of the licence is now complete; but before the B.A.s are admitted, the Doctors first, and then the Masters in their turn, retire outside, and don 'their appropriate gowns and hoods'. They receive these from those who were once their college servants, and the right of thus bringing gown and hood is strictly claimed; nor is this surprising, as unwritten custom prescribes that the gratuity must be of gold. The newly created Doctors or Masters then come back,

with the Bedel leading the procession, and 'make a bow' to the Vice-Chancellor, who usually shakes hands with the new Doctors; they are then conducted to a place in the raised seats behind and around his chair, from which they can watch the rest of the proceedings. The M.A.s either leave the house or join their friends among the spectators.

The ceremony of admitting B.A.s is much simpler. As in the case of the Masters, they are presented by their college Dean; the form of presentation is:

'Insignissime Vice-Cancellarie, vosque egregii Procuratores, praesento vobis hunc meum scholarem (*vel* hos meos scholares) in facultate Artium, ut admittatur (*vel* admittantur) ad gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus.'

The charge is then given by the Junior Proctor (see pp. 12 and 13).—After this the candidates are, without kneeling, admitted by the Vice-Chancellor, in the following words:

'Domine (*vel* Domini), ego admitto te (*vel* vos) ad gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus; insuper auctoritate mea et totius Universitatis, do tibi (*vel* vobis) potestatem legendi, et reliqua omnia faciendi quae ad eundem gradum spectant.'

This form also is old, but has been cut down from its former fullness; e.g. in the

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Laudian Statutes the candidate was admitted, among other things, to 'read a certain book of the Logic of Aristotle'. The B.A.s, when admitted, are allowed to disperse as they please, and the ceremony is over. It is unfortunate that the form of admission to the degree which is most frequently taken, and which (speaking generally) is the most real degree given, should be such an unsatisfactory and bare fragment of the old ceremonial.

Degrees in  
Absence and  
Incorporations.

It may be noticed that degrees 'in absence' are announced by the Vice-Chancellor after each set of degrees has been conferred, e.g. an 'absent' M.A. is announced after the M.A.s have made their bow. The University only allows this privilege to those who are actually out of the country, and to them only on stringent conditions; an extra payment of £5 is required.

The proceedings terminate sometimes with the admission to 'ad eundem' rank at Oxford, of graduates of Cambridge or of Dublin; this privilege is now rarely granted, though it was once freely given. When all is over, the Vice-Chancellor rises, announces 'Dissolvimus hanc Congregationem', and solemnly leaves the building in the same pomp and state with which he entered.





## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANING OF THE DEGREE CEREMONY

FOR the last 500 years certainly, for nearly The Oath of  
the M.A. 200 longer probably, the candidate presented for 'inception' in the Faculty of Arts (i. e. for the M.A. degree) has sworn that he will observe the 'statutes, privileges, customs and liberties' of his university.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to know what the average man now means when he hurriedly says 'Do fidem' after the Junior Proctor's charge; but there is no doubt that when the form of words was first used, it meant much. The candidate was being admitted into a society which was maintaining a constant struggle against encroachments, religious or secular, from without, and against unruly tendencies within. And this struggle gave to the University a vivid consciousness of its unity, which in these

<sup>1</sup> The form is found in the two 'Proctors' books', of which the oldest, that of the Junior Proctor, was drawn up (in 1407) by Richard Fleming, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln and founder of Lincoln College; but it was then already an established form, and probably goes back to the thirteenth century, i. e. to the reign of Henry III.

days of peace and quiet can hardly be conceived.

What is a  
University?

The essential idea of a university is a distinctly mediaeval one; the Middle Ages were above all things gifted with a genius for organization, and men were regarded, and regarded themselves, rather as members of a community than as individuals. The student in classical times had been free to hear what lectures he pleased, where he pleased, and on what subjects he pleased, and he had no fixed and definite relations with his fellow students. There is little or no trace of regular courses of study, still less of self-governing bodies of students, in the 'universities' of Alexandria or Athens.

But with the revival of interest in learning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the real formation of universities begins. The students formed themselves into organized bodies, with definite laws and courses of study, both because they needed each other's help and protection, and because they could not conceive themselves as existing in any other way.

These organized bodies were called 'universitates'<sup>1</sup>, i. e. guilds or associations; the

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps still necessary to emphasize the fact that the name 'University' had nothing to do with the range of subjects taught, or with the fact that

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 21

name at first had no special application to bodies of students, but is applied e. g. to a community of citizens; it was only gradually that it acquired its later and narrower meaning; it finally became specialized for a learned corporation, just as 'convent' has been set apart for a religious body, and 'corps' for a military one.

When these organized bodies were first formed is a question which it is impossible to discuss at length here, nor could a definite answer be given. The University of Oxford is, in this respect, as in so many others, characteristically English; it grew rather than was made, like most of our institutions, and it can point to no definite year of foundation, and to no individual as founder. Here it must suffice to say that references to students and teachers at Oxford are found with growing frequency all through the twelfth century; but it is only in the last quarter of that century that either of those features which differentiate a university from a mere chance body of students can be clearly traced. These two features are organized study and the right of self-government.

The origin  
of Oxford  
University.

instruction was offered to all students; the latter point is expressed in the earlier name 'studium generale' borne by universities, which is not completely superseded by 'universitas' till the fifteenth century.

The first mention of organized study is about 1184, when Giraldus Cambrensis, having written his *Topographia Hibernica* and 'desiring not to hide his candle under a bushel,' came to Oxford to read it to the students there; for three days he 'entertained' his audience as well as read to them, and the poor scholars were feasted on a separate day from the 'Doctors of the different faculties'. Here we have definite evidence of organized study. Much more important is the record of 1214 (the year before Magna Carta<sup>1</sup>), when the famous award was given by the Papal Legate, which is the oldest charter of the University of Oxford. In this the 'Chancellor' is mentioned, and we have in this office the beginnings of that self-government which, coupled with organized study, may justify us in saying that the real university was now in existence. It is quite probable that the first Doctor of Divinity whom we find 'incepting' in Oxford, is the learned and saintly Edmund Rich, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury; he seems to have

<sup>1</sup> The coincidence is not accidental. Magna Carta was wrested from a king humiliated by his submission to the Pope, and the University Charter was given to redress an act of violence on the part of the Oxford citizens, who had been stimulated in their attack on the 'clerks' of Oxford by John's quarrel with the Pope.

taken this degree in the reign of John, but he had been already teaching secular subjects in the preceding reign (Richard I's). It is significant of mediæval Oxford's position as a pillar of the Church and a champion of liberty, that her first traceable graduate should be the last Archbishop of Canterbury who was canonized, and one of the defenders of English liberties against the misgovernment of Henry III.

The 'University' of Oxford, like the great sister (or might we say mother?) school of Paris, was an association of Masters of Arts, and they alone were its proper members. In our own days, when not more than half of those who enter the University proceed to the M.A. Degree, and when only about ten per cent. of them reside for any time after the B.A. course is ended, this state of things seems inconceivable; but it has left its trace, even in popular knowledge, in the well-known fact that M.A.s are exempt from Proctorial jurisdiction; and our degree terminology is still based upon it. It is the M.A. who is admitted by the Vice-Chancellor to 'begin', i. e. to teach (*ad incipiendum*), when he is presented to him, and at Cambridge and in American Universities the ceremonies at the end of the academic year are called 'Commencement'. What seems an Irish bull is

The  
University  
a Guild of  
M.A.s.

really a survival of the oldest university arrangements.

The meaning of the 'Degree'.

As then the University is a guild of Masters, the degree is the 'step' by which the distinction of becoming a full member of it is attained. Gibbon wrote a century ago that 'the use of academical degrees is visibly borrowed from the mechanic corporations, in which an apprentice, after serving his time, obtains a testimonial of his skill, and his licence to practise his trade or mystery'. This statement, though accurate in the main, is misleading; the truth is that the learned body has not so much borrowed from the 'mechanic' one, as that both have based their arrangements independently on the same idea.

A Bachelor of Arts.

This connexion may be illustrated from the other degree title, 'Bachelor.' If the etymology at present best supported may be accepted, that honourable term was originally used for a man who worked on a 'cow-strip' of land, i. e. who was assistant of a small cultivator; whether this be true or not, it at any rate soon came to denote the apprentice as opposed to the master-workman; in fact the 'Bachelor' in the university corresponded to the 'pupil-teacher' of more humble associations in our own days. In this sense of the word, as Dr. Murray quaintly says,

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 25

a woman student can become a 'Bachelor' of Arts.

It was natural that the existing members of the 'university' or guild should be consulted as to the admission of new members; their consent was one element in the degree giving. The means by which the fitness of applicants for the degree was tested will be spoken of later, and also the methods by which the existing Masters expressed their willingness to admit the new-comer among them.

Two elements in the Degree Ceremony: (1) Consent of existing M.A.'s.

But there is quite a different element in the degree from that which has so far been mentioned. That was democratic, the consent of the community; this is autocratic, the authority conferred by a head, superior to, and outside of the community. The Vice-Chancellor of Oxford represents this second principle; he gives the degree in virtue of 'his own authority' as well as of that 'of the University'. This authority is originally that of the Church, to which, in England at any rate, all mediaeval students *ipso facto* belonged; the new student was admitted into the 'bosom' (*matricula*) of the University by receiving some form of tonsure, and for the first two centuries of University existence, no other ceremony was needed. Matriculation examinations at any rate were

(2) Outside authority, that of the Church.

in those happy days unknown. Hence the authority which the cathedral chancellor, representing the bishop, had exercised over the schools and teachers of the diocese, was extended as a matter of course to the teachers of the newly-risen Universities. The fitness of the applicant for a degree was tested by those who had it already, but the ecclesiastical authority gave the 'licence' to teach. This ecclesiastical origin of the M.A. degree is well shown in the formula of admission (pp. 15, 16). The new Master is admitted 'in honorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi' and 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost'.

The Pope  
and the  
Universities.

The close connexion of the Church and higher education is further illustrated by the view of the fourteenth-century jurists that a bull from the Pope or from the Holy Roman Emperor was needed to make a teaching body a 'Studium Generale', and to give its doctors the *jus ubique docendi*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Oxford never received this Papal ratification; but as its claim to be a 'studium generale' was indisputable, it, like Padua, was recognized as a 'general seat of study' 'by custom'. The University of Paris, however, at one time refused to admit Oxford graduates to teach without re-examination, and Oxford retorted (the Papal bull in favour of Paris notwithstanding) by refusing to recognize the rights of the Paris doctors to teach in her Schools.

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 27

A curious survival of the same idea still remains in the power of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as English Metropolitan, to recommend the Crown to grant 'Lambeth degrees' to deserving clergy; this is probably a survival of the old rights of the Archbishop as 'Legatus Natus' in England of the Holy See.

There were then two elements in the conferring of a mediaeval degree, the formal approval of the candidate by the already existing Masters and the granting of the 'licence' by the Chancellor.

Survivals in  
the modern  
Degree  
Ceremony.

Of these the 'licence' is fully retained in our present ceremony; the new M.A. receives permission (*licentia*) from the Vice-Chancellor to 'do all that belongs to the status of a Master', when 'the requirements of the statutes have been fulfilled'. This condition is now meaningless, for he has already fulfilled all 'the requirements'; but in mediaeval times it referred to the second (and what was really the most important) part of his qualifications, his appearance at the solemn 'Act' or ceremony which was the chief event of the University year. At it Masters and Doctors formally showed that they were able to perform the functions of their new rank, and were then 'admitted' to it by investiture with the 'cap' of authority, with the 'ring',

and with the 'kiss' of peace; the kiss was given by the Senior Proctor; the ring was the symbol of the inceptor's mystical marriage to his science. The 'Act' in our day only survives as giving a name to one of our two Summer Terms, which still have a place in the University Calendar, and in the requirements of 'twelve terms of residence', although only nine real terms are kept. Its disappearance was gradual; already in 1654, when John Evelyn attended the 'Act' at St. Mary's, he expresses surprise at 'those ancient ceremonies and institution (*sic*) being as yet not wholly abolished'; but the 'Act' survived into another century, although becoming more and more of a form; it is last mentioned in 1733. With the ceremony disappeared the formal exhibition of the candidate's fitness for the degree he is seeking.

The Master  
in Grammar.

But in the mediaeval University it had been far otherwise. The idea that a degree was formally taken by the applicant showing himself competent for it, may be well illustrated from the quaint ceremony of admitting a Master in Grammar at Cambridge, as described by the Elizabethan Esquire Bedel, Mr. Stokys: 'The Bedel in Arts shall bring the Master in Grammar to the Vice-Chancellor, delivering him a palmer with a rod, which the Vice-Chancellor shall give

to the said Master in Grammar, and so create him Master. Then shall the Bedel purvey for every Master in Grammar a shrewd boy, whom the Master in Grammar shall beat openly in the Schools, and he shall give the boy a groat for his labour, and another groat to him that provideth the rod and the palmer. And thus endeth the Act in that faculty.' It may be added that the Vice-Chancellor and each of the Proctors received a 'bonnet', but only one, however many 'Masters' might be incepting. In Oxford likewise the 'Master in Grammar' was created '*ferula* (i.e. palmer) *et virgis*'.

The Oxford M.A. had to show his qualifications in a way less painful, though as practical, by publicly attacking or defending theses solemnly approved for discussion by Congregation. These theses were themselves by no means always solemn, e.g. one of those appointed in 1600 was 'an uxor perversa humanitate potius quam asperitate sanetur?' ('whether a shrew is better cured by kindness or by severity'). This question, obviously suggested by Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, which was written soon after 1594, was answered by the incepting M.A.s in the opposite sense to the dramatist. It need hardly be said that all the disputations were in Latin. The Doctors too of the different

The Disputations at the Act.

faculties were created at the 'Act', after disputations on subjects connected with their faculty. Something resembling these disputations still survives in a shadowy form at Oxford, in the requirements for the degrees of B.D. and D.D. A candidate for the B.D. has to read in the Divinity School two theses on some theological subject approved by the Regius Professor, a candidate for the D.D. has to read and expound three passages of Holy Scripture; in both cases notice has to be given beforehand of the subject, a custom which survives from the time when the candidate might expect to have his theses disputed; but now the Regius Professor and the candidate generally have the Divinity School to themselves.

All the ceremonies of the 'Act' have passed away from Oxford completely.<sup>1</sup> They are only referred to here as serving to illustrate the idea that a new Master was not admitted till he had performed a 'masterpiece', i. e. done a piece of work such as a Master might be expected to do. There was till quite recently one last trace of them in our degree arrangements; a new M.A. was not admitted

<sup>1</sup> In the Scotch Universities Doctors are still created by '*birettatio*', the laying on of the cap, and I believe this is still done at many 'Commencements' in America.

to the privileges of his office till the end of the term in which he had been 'licensed to incept'; although the University, having given up the 'Act', allowed no opportunity of 'incepting', an interval was left in which the ceremony might have taken place. Now, however, for purposes of practical convenience, even this form is dropped, and a new M.A. enters on his privileges, e. g. voting in Convocation, &c., as soon as he has been licensed by the Vice-Chancellor. Strictly speaking an Oxford man never takes his M.A., for there is no ceremony of institution; he is 'licensed' to take part in a ceremony which has ceased to exist.

And yet in another form the 'Act' survives in our familiar Commemoration; the relation of this to the 'Act' seems to be somewhat as follows. The Sheldonian Theatre was opened, as will be described later (p. 81), with a great literary and musical performance, a 'sort of dedication of the Theatre'; this was called 'Encaenia'.<sup>1</sup> So pleased was the University with the performance that the Chancellor next year (1670) ordered that it should be repeated annually, on the Friday before the 'Act'. From the very first there was a tendency to confuse the two ceremonies;

<sup>1</sup> Compare St. John x. 22, ἐγκαίνια = 'The Feast of the Dedication'.

even the accurate antiquarian, Antony Wood, speaks of music as part of 'the Act', which was really performed at the preliminary gathering, the Encaenia. The new function gradually grew in importance, and additions were made to it; the munificent Lord Crewe, prince-bishop of Durham, who enjoys an unenviable immortality in the pages of Macaulay, and a more fragrant if less lasting memory in Besant's charming romance *Dorothy Forster*, left some of his great wealth for the Creweian Oration, in which annual honour is done to the University Benefactors at the Commemoration.

Hence, while the customs of the 'Act' became more and more meaningless and neglected, the Encaenia became more and more popular, until finally the older ceremony was merged in the newer one. In our Commemoration degree-giving still takes place, along with recitation of prize poems and the paying of honour to benefactors. The degrees are all honorary, but they are submitted to the House in the same way as ordinary degrees; the Vice-Chancellor puts the question to the Convocation, just as the Proctor submits the 'grace' to Congregation, and in theory a vote is taken on the creation of the new D.C.L.s, just as in theory the Proctors take the votes as to the admission of new M.A.s.

Commemoration may be, as John Richard Green said, 'Oxford in masquerade'; there may be 'grand incongruities, Abyssinian heroes robed in literary scarlet, degrees conferred by the suffrages of virgins in pink bonnets and blue, a great academical ceremony drowned in an atmosphere of Aristophanean (*sic*) chaff'. But the chaff is the legitimate successor of the burlesque performance of the *Terrae Filius* at the old 'Act', and the degrees are submitted to the House with the old formula; even the presence of ladies would have been no surprise to our predecessors of 200 years ago, however much they would have astonished our mediaeval founders and benefactors; in the Sheldonian from the first the gallery under the organ was always set apart for 'ladies and gentlewomen'. 'Oxford', to quote J. R. Green once again, 'is simply young', but when he goes on to say 'she is neither historic nor theological nor academical', he exaggerates; the charm of Oxford lies in the fact that her youth is at home among survivals historic, theological, and academical; and the old survives while the new flourishes.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE DEGREE CEREMONY

The Preliminaries  
of the  
Degree  
Ceremony.

It is needless to describe the requirements of our modern examination system, for those who present themselves for degrees, and their friends, know them only too well. And to describe completely the requirements of the mediaeval or the Laudian University would be to enter into details which, however interesting, would yet belong to antiquarian history, and which have no relation to our modern arrangements.

But there are certain broad principles which are common to the present system and to its predecessors, and which well deserve attention.

(1) Residence.

The first and most important of these is that Oxford has always required from those seeking a degree, as she requires now, 'residence' in the University for a given time. It is declared in the Proctors' books (mediaeval statutes used picturesque language), that 'Whereas those who seek to





mount to the highest places by a short cut, neglecting the steps (*gradibus*) thereto, seem to court a fall, no M.A. should present a candidate (for the B.A.) unless the person to be presented swear that he has studied the liberal arts in the Schools, for at least four years at some proper university'. There was of course a further three years required of those taking the M.A. degree, and a still longer period for the higher faculties. Residence, it may be added, was required to be continuous; the modern arrangement which makes it possible to put in a term, whenever convenient to the candidate, would have seemed a scandal to our predecessors. It will be noticed that much more than our modern 'pernoctation' was then required for residence, and that migration from other universities was more freely permitted than is now the case. This freedom to study at more than one university is still the rule in Germany, and Oxford is returning to it in the new statute on Colonial and Foreign Universities, which excuses members of other bodies who have complied with certain conditions, from one year of residence, and from part of our examinations.

The University in old days, however, was more prepared to relax this requirement than it is in modern times; the sons of knights

Relaxations  
of Resi-  
dence.

and the eldest sons of esquires<sup>1</sup> were permitted to take a degree after three years, and 'graces' might be granted conferring still further exemptions; e. g. a certain G. More was let off with two years only, in 1571, because being 'well born and the only son of his father', he is afraid that he 'may be called away before he has completed the appointed time', and so may 'be unable to take his degree conveniently'. The University is less indulgent now.

(2) Lectures. The old statute quoted above also implies that there were special lectures to be heard during the four years of residence; some of them had to be attended twice over. The old Oxford records give careful directions how the lectures were to be given; the text was to be closely adhered to and explained, and digressions were forbidden. There are, however, none of those strict rules as to the punctuality of the lecturer, the pace at which he was to lecture, &c., which make some of the mediaeval statutes of other universities so amusing<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This custom has left its trace in our matriculation arrangements. Candidates are still required to state the rank of their father, and their position in the family, though birth and primogeniture no longer carry any privileges with them at Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> The University authorities at Paris and elsewhere had a great objection to dictating lectures; on the

The list of subjects for a mediaeval degree is too long to be given here; it may be mentioned, however, that Aristotle, then as always, held a prominent place in Oxford's Schools.<sup>1</sup> This was common to other universities, but the weight given to Mathematics and to Music was a special feature of the Oxford course.

The lectures were of course University and not college lectures; the latter hardly existed before the sixteenth century, and were as a rule confined to members of the college. As there were no 'Professors' in our sense, the instruction was given by the ordinary Masters of Arts, among whom those who were of less than two years' standing were compelled to lecture, and were styled 'necessary regents' (i. e. they 'governed the Schools'). They were paid by the fees of their pupils (*Collecta*, a word familiar in a different sense in our 'Collections'). There was keen competition in early days to

other hand the mediaeval undergraduate, like his modern successor, loved to 'get something down', and was wont to protest forcibly against a lecturer who went too fast, by hissing, shouting, or even organized stone-throwing.

<sup>1</sup> It is amusing to notice that the irreducible minimum of the *Ethics* at Paris in the fourteenth century consists of the same first four books that are still almost universally taken up at Oxford for the pass degree (i. e. in the familiar 'Group A. I').

attract the largest possible audience, but later on the University enacted that all fees should be pooled and equally divided among the teachers. For this (and for other reasons) the lectures became more and more a mere form, and no real part of a student's education.

Cutting  
Lectures.

There had been from time immemorial a fixed tariff for 'cutting'<sup>1</sup> lectures, and there was a further fine of the same amount for failing to take notes. But the University from time to time tried actually to enforce attendance. A curious instance of this occurs toward the close of the reign of Elizabeth; a number of students were solemnly warned that 'by cutting' lectures, they were incurring the guilt of perjury, because they had sworn to obey the statutes which required attendance at lectures. They explained they had thought their 'neglect' to hear lectures only involved them in the fine and not in 'perjury', and after this apology they seem to have proceeded to their degrees without further difficulty.

Graces.

In fact there was a growing separation after the fifteenth century, between the

<sup>1</sup> It was only 2*d.*, a sum which has been immortalized by Samuel Johnson's famous retort on his tutor: 'Sir, you have sconced me 2*d.* for non-attendance at a lecture not worth a penny.'

formal requirements for the degree, and the actual University system ; sometimes irreconcilable difficulties arose, e. g. when two students were (in 1599) summoned to explain why they had not attended one of the lectures required for the degree, and they presented the unanswerable excuse that the teacher in question had not lectured, having himself been excused by the University from the duty of giving the lecture. In fact the whole system would have been unworkable but for the power of granting 'graces' or dispensations, which has already been referred to : how necessary and almost universal these were, may be seen from the fact that even so conscientious a disciplinarian as Archbishop Laud, stern alike to himself and to others, was dispensed from observing all the statutes when he took his D.D. (1608) 'because he was called away suddenly on necessary business'. We can well believe that Laud then, as always, was busy, but there were other students who got their 'graces' with much less excuse. Modern students may well envy the good fortune of the brothers Carey from Exeter College, who (in 1614) were dispensed because 'being shortly about to depart from the University, they desired to take with them the B.A. degree as a benediction from their Alma Mater, the University'.

The New  
College  
Privilege.

One curious development of the old system of 'graces' survived in one of the most prominent of Oxford colleges almost till within living memory.<sup>1</sup> William of Wykeham had ordained that his students should perform the whole of the University requirements, and not avail themselves of dispensations. When the granting of these became so frequent that they were looked upon as the essential part of the system, the idea grew up that New College men were to be exempt from the ordinary tests of the University. Hence a Wykehamist took his degree with no examination but that of his own college, both under the Laudian Statute and after the great statute of 1800, which set up the modern system of examinations. What the founder had intended as an encouragement for industry was made by his degenerate disciples an excuse for idleness.

(3) Examinations.

So far only the qualifications of residence

<sup>1</sup> It was resigned voluntarily by New College in 1834; but the distinction is still observed (or should be) that a Fellow of the College needs no grace for his degree, or if one is asked, 'demands' it as a right (*postulat* is used instead of the usual *supplicat*). I have adopted Dr. Rashdall's explanation of the origin of this strange privilege. It is curious to add that King's College, Cambridge, copied it, along with other and better features, from its great predecessor and model, New College.

and attendance on lectures have been spoken of. The great test of our own times, the examination, has not even been referred to. And it must certainly be admitted that the terrors of the modern written examinations were unknown in the old universities; such testing as took place was always *viva voce*. That the tests were serious, in theory at any rate, may be fairly inferred from the frequent statutes at Paris against bribing examiners, and from the provision at Bologna that at this 'rigorous and tremendous examination', the examiner should treat the examinee 'as his own son'. Robert de Sorbonne, the founder of the famous college at Paris, has even left a sermon in which an elaborate comparison is drawn between university examinations and the Last Judgment; it need hardly be said that the moral of the sermon is the greater severity of the heavenly test as compared with the earthly; if a man neglects his prescribed book, he will be rejected once, but if he neglect 'the book of conscience, he will be rejected for ever'. Such a comparison was not likely to have been made, had not the earthly ordeal possessed terrors at least as great as those that mark its modern successors.

It may be added at once, however, that we hear very little about examinations in old

Respon-  
sions.

Oxford; but still there were some. Then as now the first examination was Responsions, a name which has survived for at least 500 years, whatever changes there have been in its meaning. The University also still retains the time-honoured name of the 'Masters of the Schools' for those who conduct this examination (though there are now six and not four, as in the thirteenth century), and candidates who pass are still said as of old to have 'responded in Parviso'.<sup>1</sup>

In the fifteenth century a man had to be up at least a year before he entered for this examination, in the sixteenth century he could not do so before his ninth term, i. e. only a little more than a year before he took his B.A. The examination is now generally taken before coming into residence, and the most patriotic Oxford man would hardly apply to it the enthusiastic praises of the seventeenth-century Vice-Chancellor (1601) who called it '*gloriosum illud et laudabile in parviso certamen, quo antiquitus inclaruit nostra Academia*'.

<sup>1</sup> i. e. in the Parvis or Porch of St. Mary's, where the disputations on Logic and Grammar, which formed the examination, took place: this was probably a room over the actual entrance, such as was common in mediaeval churches; there is a small example of one still to be seen in Oxford, over the south porch of St. Mary Magdalen Church.

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At the end of four years, as has been said, a man 'determined', i.e. performed the dis-putations and other requirements for the degree of B.A., and after this ceremony there were more 'lectures and disputings' to be performed in the additional three years' residence required for a Master's degree. Nothing, however, is said of definite examinations as to the intellectual fitness of candidates for the M.A. Hearne (early in the eighteenth century) quotes from an old book, that the candidate 'must submit himself privately to the examination of everyone of that degree, whereunto he desireth to be admitted'. But the terror of such a multiplied test was no doubt greatly softened by the fact that what is everybody's business is nobody's business.

The stress laid on the course followed rather than on the final examination brings out the great idea underlying the old degree; it sought its qualifications on all sides of a man's life, and not simply in his power to get up and reproduce knowledge. Hence it is provided that M.A.s should admit to 'Determination' (i.e. to the B.A.) only those who are 'fit in knowledge and character'; 'if any question arises on other points, e.g. as to age, stature, or other outward qualifications (*corporum circumstantiis*)', it is re-

Other ex-aminations

(†) Character.

served for the majority of the Regents. How minute was the inquiry into character can be seen in the case of a certain Robert Smith (of Magdalen) in 1582, who was refused his B.A., because he had brought scandalous charges against the fellows of his College, had called an M.A. 'to his face "arrant knave"', had been at a disputation in the Divinity School 'in the open assembly of Doctors and Masters 'with his hat on his head', and had 'taken the wall of M.A.s without any moving of his hat'.

All such minute inquiries as these are now left to the colleges, who are required by statute to see to it that candidates for the degree are 'of good character' (*probis moribus*).

(5) *Circuitus*. When a candidate's 'grace' had been obtained there was still another precaution before the degree, whether B.A. or M.A., was actually conferred. He had to go bare-headed, in his academical dress, round the 'Schools', preceded by the Bedel of his faculty, and to call on the Vice-Chancellor and two Proctors before sunset; this gave more opportunity to the authorities or to any M.A. to see whether he was fit. Of this old ceremony a bare fragment still remains in the custom that a candidate's name has to be entered in a book at the Vice-Chancellor's house before

noon on the day preceding the degree-giving ; but this formality now is usually performed for a man by his college Dean, or even by a college servant.

When the day of the ceremony arrived, (6) *De positio.* solemn testimony was given to the Proctor of the candidate's fitness by those who 'deposed' for him. In the case of the B.A., nine Bachelors were required to testify to fitness ; in the case of the M.A., nine Masters had to swear this from 'sure knowledge', and five more 'to the best of their belief' (*de credulitate*). These depositions were whispered into the ears of the Proctor by the witnesses kneeling before him. The information was given on oath, and as it were under the seal of confession ; for neither they nor the Proctors were allowed to reveal it. Of all this picturesque ceremony nothing is left but the number 'nine' ; so many M.A.s at least must be present, in order that the degree may be rightly given. It is not infrequent, towards the close of a degree ceremony, for a Dean who is about to leave, having presented his own men, to be asked to remain until the proceedings are over, in order to 'make a House'.

The preliminaries, formal or otherwise, to the conferment of degrees have now been described. Two other points must be here

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mentioned, in one of which the University still retains its old custom, in the other it has departed from it.

Degrees in Arts required for entrance to the Higher Faculties.

The first is the requirement which has always been maintained in Oxford, that a candidate for one of the higher degrees, e.g. the D.D. or the D.M., should have first passed through the Arts course, and taken the ordinary B.A. degree.

This principle, that a general education should precede a special study, is most important now ; it has also a venerable history. It was established by the University as long ago as the beginning of the fourteenth century, and was the result of a long struggle against the Mendicant Friars. This struggle was part of that jealousy between the Regular and the Secular Clergy, which is so important in the history of the English Church in mediaeval times.

The University, as identified with the ordinary clergy, steadfastly resisted the claim of the great preaching orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, to proceed to a degree in Theology without first taking the Arts course. The case was carried to Rome more than once, and was decided both for and against the University ; but royal favour and popular feeling were for the Oxford authorities against the Friars, and the principle

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was maintained then, and, as has been said, has been maintained always.

In the other point there has been a great departure from old usage. The original degree course involved seven years' residence for those who wished to become Masters. Even before the Reformation, the number of those who took the degree was comparatively small, although the candidate at entrance was often only thirteen years old or even younger; and with the improvement of the schools of the country in the sixteenth century, the need of such prolonged residence became less, as candidates were better prepared before they came up. Since the old arrangements were clearly unworkable, different universities have modified them in various ways; in Scotland the Baccalaureate has disappeared altogether, and the undergraduate passes straight to his M.A.; in France the degree of *bachelier* is the lowest of university qualifications, and more nearly resembles our Matriculation than anything else; in Germany the Doctorate is the reward of undergraduate studies, although it need hardly be said that those studies are on different lines from those of our own undergraduates. In England the old names have both been maintained (the English, like the Romans, are essentially conservative), but their meaning has been entirely altered.

The M.A. becomes a form.

We can trace in the Elizabethan and the Stuart periods the gradual modification of the old requirements for the residence of M.A.s, by means of dispensations. This was done in two ways. Sometimes the actual time required was shortened, because a man was poor, because he could get clerical promotion if he were an M.A., or even by a general 'grace' in order to increase the number of those taking the degree. If only a small number incepted it was thought a reflection on Oxford, and there were always Cambridge spectators at hand to note it. And as the Proctors were largely paid by the degree fees, they had an obvious interest in increasing the number of M.A.s.

But it was more frequent to retain the length of time, but to dispense with actual residence; special reasons for this, e.g. clerical duties, travel, lawsuits, are at first given, but it gradually became the normal procedure, and residence ceased to be required after the B.A. degree had been taken. The Master's term was retained *pro forma* till within the recollection of graduates still living (it will be remembered that Mr. Hughes makes 'Tom Brown' return to keep it, a sadder and a wiser man); but even that form has now disappeared, and the Oxford M.A. qualifies for his degree only by continuing to

live and by paying fees. It may be added at once that the maintenance of the form is essential to the finance of the University; the M.A. fees alone, apart from the dues paid in the interval between taking the B.A. and the M.A., amount to some £6,000 a year, and considering how little the ordinary man pays as an undergraduate to the University, the payment of the M.A. is one that is fully due; it should be regarded by all Oxford men as an expression of the gratitude to their Alma Mater, which they are in duty bound to show. The future of Oxford finance would be brighter if some reformer could devise means by which the relation of the M.A. to his University might become more of a reality, so that he might realize his obligations to her. The doctrine of Walter de Merton that a foundation should benefit by the 'happy fortune' (*uberiore fortuna*) of its sons in subsequent life, is one that sadly needs emphasizing in Oxford.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OFFICERS OF THE UNIVERSITY

The Origin  
of the  
Chancellor's  
Authority.

THE beginning of the organized authority of the University, as has been already said (p. 22), is the mention of the Chancellor in the charter of 1214. In the earliest period this officer was the centre of the constitutional life of Oxford. Although the bishop's representative, and as such endowed with an authority external to the University, he was, perhaps from the first, elected by the Doctors and Masters there. Hence by a truly English anomaly, the representative of outside authority becomes identified with the representative of the democratic principle, and the Oxford Chancellor combined in himself the position of the elected Rector of a foreign university, and that of the Chancellor appointed by an external power. The reason for this anomaly is partly the remote position of the episcopal see; Lincoln, the bishop's seat, was more than 100 miles from the University town, which lay on the very borders of his great diocese. The com-





ination too was surely made easy by the influence of the great scholar-saint, Bishop Grosseteste, who had himself filled the position of Chancellor (though he may not have borne the title) before he passed to the see of Lincoln, which he held for eighteen years (1235-1253) during the critical period of the growth of the academic constitution.

During the first two centuries of the University's existence, the Chancellor was a resident official; but in the fifteenth century it became customary to elect some great ecclesiastic, who was able by his influence and wealth to promote the interests of Oxford and Oxford scholars; such an one was George Neville, the brother of the King-Maker Earl of Warwick, who became Chancellor in 1453 at the age of twenty. He no doubt owed his early elevation to the magnificence with which he had entertained the whole of Oxford when he had proceeded to his M.A. from Balliol College in the preceding year.

From the fifteenth century onwards the Vice-Chancellor takes the place of the Chancellor as the centre of University life; as the Chancellor's representative, he is nominated every year by letters from him, though the appointment is in theory approved by the vote of Convocation.

The Vice-Chancellor.

The nomination of a Vice-Chancellor is for a year, but renomination is allowed ; as a matter of fact, the Chancellor's choice is limited by custom in two ways ; no Vice-Chancellor is reappointed more than three times, i. e. the tenure of the office is limited to four years, and the nomination is always offered to the senior head of a house who has not held the position already ; if any head has declined the office when offered to him on a previous occasion, he is treated as if he had actually held it.

The Vice-Chancellor has all the powers and duties of the Chancellor in the latter's absence ; but in the rare cases when the Chancellor visits Oxford, his deputy sinks for the time into the position of an ordinary head of a college.

The Control  
of Examinations.

The only duties of the Vice-Chancellor that need be here mentioned are his authority and control over examinations and over degrees, duties which are of course connected. Any departure from the ordinary course of proceeding needs his approval : e. g. (to take a constantly recurring case) he alone can give permission to examine an undergraduate out of his turn, when any one has failed to present himself at the right time for viva voce.

Now that all Oxford arrangements for

examinations have developed into a cast-iron system, the appeal, except in matters of detail, to the Vice-Chancellor is rare; but it was not always so; his control was at one time a very real and important matter. In the case of the famous Dr. Fell, Dean of Christ Church, Antony Wood notes 'that he did frequent examinations for degrees, hold the examiners up to it, and if they would or could not do their duty, he would do it himself, to the pulling down of many'. It is no wonder that men said of him:—

I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,  
The reason why I cannot tell.

He was equally careful of the decencies and proprieties of the degree ceremony; 'his first care (as Vice-Chancellor) was to make all degrees go in caps, and in public assemblies to appear in hoods. He also reduced the caps and gowns worn by all degrees to their former size and make, and ordered all cap-makers and tailors to make them so.'

It was necessary for him to be strict; some of the Puritans, although they were not on the whole neglectful of the dignity and the studies of the University, had carried their dislike of all ceremonies and forms so far as to attempt to abolish academical

dress. 'The new-comers from Cambridge and other parts (in 1648) observed nothing according to statutes.' It was only the stubborn opposition of the Proctor, Walter Pope (in 1658), which had prevented the formal abolition of caps and gowns; and one of Fell's predecessors as Vice-Chancellor, the famous Puritan divine, John Owen, also Dean of Christ Church, had caused great scandal to the 'old stock remaining' by wearing his hat (instead of a college cap) in Congregation and Convocation; 'he had as much powder in his hair as would discharge eight cannons' (but this was a Cambridge scandal, and may be looked on with suspicion), and wore for the most part 'velvet jacket, his breeches set round at knee with ribbons pointed, Spanish leather boots with Cambric tops'. But in spite of this somewhat pronounced opposition to a 'prelatical cut', Owen had been in his way a disciplinarian. He had arrested with his own hands, pulling him down from the rostrum and committing him to Bocardo prison, an undergraduate who had carried too far the wit of the 'Terrae Filius', the licensed jester of the solemn Act.

The Bedels.

Fortunately the Vice-Chancellor in these more orderly days has not to carry out discipline with his own hands in this summary

fashion. He has his attendants, the Bedels, for this purpose, who, as the statutes order, 'wearing the usual gowns and round caps, walk before him in the customary way with their staves, three gold and one silver.' The office of Bedel is one of the oldest in Oxford, and is common to all Universities; Dr. Rashdall goes so far as to say that 'an allusion to a bidellus is in general (though not invariably) a sufficiently trustworthy indication that a School is really a University or Studium Generale'. The higher rank of 'Esquire Bedel' has been abolished, and the old office has sadly shrunk in dignity; it is hard now to conceive the state of things in the reign of Henry VII, when the University was distracted by the counter-claims of the candidates for the post of Divinity Bedel, when one of them had the support of the Prince of Wales, and another that of the King's mother, the Lady Margaret, and when the electors were hard put to it to decide between candidates so royally backed; it was a contest between gratitude in the sense of a lively expectation of favours to come, and gratitude for benefits already received (i. e. the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity, the first endowment of University teaching in Oxford). Even the Puritans had attached the greatest impor-

tance to the office, and a humorous side is given to the sad account of the Parliamentary Visitation in 1648 and the following years, by the distress of the Visitors at the disappearance of the old symbols of authority. The Bedels, being good Royalists, had gone off with their official staves, and refused to surrender them to the usurping intruders. Resolution after resolution was passed to remedy the defect ; the Visitors were reduced to ordering that the stipends of suppressed lectureships should be applied to the purchase of staves, and were finally compelled to appeal to the colleges for contributions towards the replacing of these signs of authority. The present staves date from the eighteenth century, while the old ones <sup>1</sup> rest in honourable retirement at the University Galleries.

Though the office of Bedel has ceased to be in our own days a matter of high University politics, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the part played by the Bedel of the Faculty of Arts in the degree ceremony. It is he who marshals the candidates for presentation, distributes the testaments on which they have to take their oath, and superintends the retirement of the Doctors and the M.A.s into the Apodyterium,

<sup>1</sup> For their history and for a description of the present staves, cf. Appendix II.

whence they return under his guidance in their new robes, to make their bow to the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors.<sup>1</sup> If the truth must be added, he is often relied on by these officers to tell them what they have to do and to say.

If the Vice-Chancellor is responsible for order in the Congregation, and actually admits to the degree, the Proctors, as representatives of the Faculty of Arts, play an equally important part in the ceremony. These officials are to the undergraduate without doubt the most prominent figures in the University; they form the centre of a large part of Oxford mythology; it may be said (it is to be hoped the comparison is not irreverent) that they play much the same part in Oxford stories as the Evil One does in mediaeval legends, for like him they are mysterious and omnipresent beings, powerful

The  
Proctors.

<sup>1</sup> It seems a pity that the old order cannot be restored, and the candidates kept outside till their 'graces' have been passed. Formerly they were kept in the 'Pig Market', i.e. the ante-chamber of the Divinity School (see p. 89), or in the Apodyterium, till this part of the ceremony was completed; they were then finally ushered into the presence of the Vice-Chancellor by the Yeoman Bedel. The modern arrangement, by which candidates are present at the passing of their own 'graces', i.e. at their admission to the degree, may be convenient, but it is quite inconsistent with the whole theory of the ceremony.

for mischief, yet often not without a sense of humour, who are by turns the oppressors and the butts of the wily undergraduate. To most Oxford men it comes as a discovery, about the time they take their degree at the earliest, that the Proctors have many other things to do besides looking after them.

The office goes back to the very beginnings of the University and is first mentioned in 1248, when the Proctors are associated with the Chancellor in the charter of Henry III, which gave the University a right to interfere in the assize of bread and beer.

Their number recalls one of the most important points in the early history of Oxford. The division of the students according to 'Nations', which prevailed at mediaeval Paris, and which still survives in some of the Scotch universities, never was established in the English ones; in this as in other respects the strong hand of the Anglo-Norman kings had made England one. But though there was no room for division of 'Nations', there was a strongly-marked line of separation between the Northerners and the Southerners, i.e. between those from the north of the Trent, with whom the Scotch were joined, and those south of that river, among whom were reckoned the Welsh and the Irish. The fights between these factions

were a continual trouble to the mediaeval University, and it was necessary for the M.A.s of each division to have their own Proctor; hence originally the Senior Proctor was the elect of the Southerners and the Junior Proctor of the Northerners.

Proctorial elections were a source of constantly recurring trouble, till Archbishop Laud at last transferred the election to the colleges, each of which took its turn in a cycle carefully calculated according to the numbers of each college. In our own generation this system has been carried a step further, and all colleges, large or small alike, have their turn for the Proctorship, which comes to each once in eleven years. The electors for it are the members of the governing body along with all members of Congregation belonging to the college.

The Proctors represent the Masters of Arts as opposed to the higher faculties (i.e. the Doctors), and it is in virtue of the time-honoured right of the Faculty of Arts to decide all matters concerning the granting of 'graces', that the Proctors take their prominent part in the degree ceremony. Although the Vice-Chancellor is presiding, it is the Proctor who submits the degrees to the House, and declares them 'granted'. Before doing this the two Proctors, as has

been said (p. 9), walk half-way down the House and return, thus in form fulfilling the injunction of the statutes that 'they should take the votes in the usual way'.<sup>1</sup>

The Registrar.

One other University official must be mentioned, the Registrar, i.e. the Secretary of the University. The existence of a Register of Convocation implies that there must have been an officer of this kind in mediaeval Oxford, but the actual title does not occur till the sixteenth century; its first holder seems to have been John London of New College, so scandalously notorious in the first days of the Reformation. But the character of University officials was not high in the sixteenth century. One of the earliest Registrars, Thomas Key of All Souls, was expelled from his post in 1552 for having during two years neglected to take any note of the University proceedings; he actually struck in the face another Master of Arts who was trying to detain him at the order of the Vice-Chancellor. For this he was sent to prison, and fined 26*s.* 8*d.*; but he was released the very next day, and his fine cut down to 4*d.* He lived to be elected Master of University College nine years later, and to be the mendacious champion of the antiquity of Oxford

<sup>1</sup> For the importance of the Proctorial walk and for the legends attached to it, compare p. 10.

against the Cambridge advocate. This was his namesake Dr. Caius, equally mendacious but more reputable, the pious 'second founder' of a great Cambridge college.

The Registrar's duty in the degree ceremony, as has been said (p. 5), is to certify that the candidates have fulfilled all the requirements for the degree, that they have received 'graces' from their colleges as to proper residence, and that all examinations have in every case been passed; the Registrar derives this latter information from the University books in which records are now kept of each stage of an undergraduate's career. It is only recently, however, that this system has been adopted; less than twenty years ago each candidate for a degree had to produce his 'testamur', the precious scrap of blue paper issued after every examination to each successful candidate, pass-man and class-man alike. It was a clumsy system, but it had strong claims of sentiment; most old Oxford men will remember the rush to get the 'testamur' for self or for friend, and the triumph with which the visible symbol was brought home. Since the University has abolished these, it might with advantage introduce the custom of granting to each graduate, on taking his degree, a formal certificate of the examinations he has passed,

of his residence and of the rank to which he has attained. Such a certificate, whether called 'diploma' or by any other name, would be of practical value; in these days study is international, and the number of men is very great, and is increasing, who need to produce evidence of their University career and its results for the authorities of foreign or American universities. 'These bodies often issue diplomas of most dignified appearance; it is a pity that Oxford, which in some ways is so rich in survivals of picturesque custom, should fail in this matter. It is true that a certificate of the degree can be obtained, if a man writes to the Registrar for it and pays an extra fee; this additional payment seems a little unjust; and men would be more willing to take the degree if, as they say, 'they had something definite to show for it.'

The Pre-  
senter for  
the degrees.

The presenters for the degrees are mainly college officials; it is only for the higher degrees that University professors present, and then not simply in virtue of being University officials<sup>1</sup>, but also as having already attained the degree which the candidate is seeking. The old Oxford theory was that of the Roman magistracy, that only those

<sup>1</sup> For the presentation to the new doctorates, D.Litt. and D.Sc., cf. p. 11.

who were of a certain rank could admit others to that rank. Thus the Regius Professor of Medicine usually presents our medical Bachelors and Doctors ; but he performs this duty because he is a Doctor ; he has, however, as occupying the professorial chair, the right to claim presentations for himself, as against all other Doctors, even those senior to him in standing. This right is a matter of immemorial custom for the Regius Professors ; it has been given to the Professor of Music by a recent statute (1897).

## CHAPTER V

### UNIVERSITY DRESS

Importance  
attached to  
dress.

‘FROM the soberest drab to the high flaming scarlet, spiritual idiosyncrasies unfold themselves in the choice of colour; if the cut betoken intellect and talent, so does the colour betoken temper and heart.’

Mediaeval Oxford would have agreed with Carlyle’s German Professor in his philosophy of clothes, as an instance or two will show. A solemn enactment was passed in 1358 against the tailors, who were apparently trying to shorten the length of University garments; ‘for it is honourable and in accordance with reason that clerks to whom God has given an advantage over the lay folk in their adornments within, should likewise differ from the lay folk outwardly in dress.’ If any tailor broke the statute, he was to be imprisoned.

Statute as  
to M.A.s.

The observance of this principle was strictly enjoined also on members of the University; the Master of Arts at his inception had to swear that he has ‘of his own’ the dress proper for his degree, and that he will wear





PROFESSOR



COMMENÇALS  
Superioris ordinis



it on all proper occasions. Moreover it was further provided that Masters should wear 'boots either black or as near black as possible', and that they should never give 'ordinary lectures' when wearing 'shoes cut down or short in any way'.

Naturally means had to be taken also to Sophisters<sup>1</sup>. prevent members of the University of lower rank from usurping the dress of their superiors. In 1489 it was ordained that 'whereas the insolence of many scholars in our days is reaching such a pitch of audacity that they are not afraid to wear hoods like Masters', henceforth they were to wear only the '*liripipium consutum et non contextum*'<sup>2</sup>, on pain of a fine of 2s.; the fine was to be shared between the University, the Chancellor, and the Proctors; it was further provided (which seems unnecessary) that if any official had been negligent in exacting it, his portion should go to the University.

<sup>1</sup> When a candidate had passed Responsions, he was called a '*sophista generalis*'. The title has now died out in the English Universities, but survives in the form 'sophomore' in America.

<sup>2</sup> This adornment seems to have survived in Oxford till within the last half-century; at all examinations subsequent to 'Responsions' a candidate, when going in for Viva Voce, had a little black hood placed round his neck; this arrangement has now disappeared.

B.A.s.

At the same time, the hoods of the B.A.s were legislated on: 'Whereas the B.A.s in the different faculties, careless of the safety of their own souls,' were wearing hoods insufficiently lined with fur, henceforth all hoods were to be fully lined; a fortnight was given to the B.A.s to put their scanty hoods right. The danger to salvation was incurred by the perjury involved in the neglect of a statute which had been solemnly accepted on oath.

Tailors.

The University further settled what was to be charged by tailors for cutting the various dresses; the prices seem very low, only 3*d.* for a furless gown (*toga*) and 6*d.* for a furred cope; but no doubt the tailors of those days knew how to evade the statute by enhancing their profit on the price of materials; we have one suit before the Chancellor (in 1439) in which the furred gown in question was priced at no less than 36*s.* 8*d.*

These instances, which could be multiplied indefinitely, are enough to show how careful the mediaeval University was as to dress. But it will be noticed that they nearly all refer to the dress of graduates; the modern University on the other hand practically leaves its M.A.s alone<sup>1</sup>, while it still enforces

<sup>1</sup> The old statutes as to the dress of graduates are

(at least in theory) academic dress on its undergraduates, as to whom the mediaeval University had little to say.

The Laudian Statutes here as elsewhere form the transition from the arrangements of Pre-Reformation Oxford to those of our own day. They enforce (on all alike) dress of a proper colour, short hair, and abstinence from 'absurdus ille et fastuosus mos' of walking abroad in fancy boots (*ocreae*); only while the graduate is fined 6*s.* 8*d.* for offending, the undergraduate ('if his age be suitable') suffers '*poena corporalis*' at the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors.

Perhaps the following general points may be made as to University dress in the olden times.

As all members of the University were *ipso facto* clerks, their dress had to correspond; the marks of clerical dress were that it was to be of a certain length (later it was specified that it should reach the heels, *talaris*), and that it should be closed in front, but there was great licence as to colour; the 'black' or 'subfusc' prescribed by the

(1) University Dress clerical.

still in force, and are partially observed at conferment of degrees, examinations, &c., but there is considerable slackness as to them. It is only too common to see a Dean 'presenting' in a coloured tie, although his undergraduates are all compelled to don a white one.

Laudian Statutes is the result of the asceticism of the Reformation, and was unknown in Oxford before the sixteenth century. We have in the wills of students and in the inventories of their properties, abundant evidence that our mediaeval predecessors wore garments suitable to 'Merrie Englande', e. g. of green, blue or blood-colour. Sometimes the founder of a college left directions what 'livery' all his students should wear; e. g. Robert Eglesfield prescribed for the fellows of Queen's College that they were to dine in Hall in purple cloaks, the Doctors wearing these trimmed with fur, while the M.A.s wore theirs 'plain'; the colour was 'to suit the dignity of their position and to be like the blood of The Lord'. Cambridge colleges still in some cases prescribe for their undergraduates gowns of a special colour or cut.

One curious survival of the 'clerkship' of all students is the requirement of the white tie in all University examinations and in the degree ceremony. The 'bands', which (to quote Dr. Rashdall) 'are merely a clerical collar', have disappeared from the necks of all lay members of the University below the degree of Doctor, except the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors; the dress of the latter is the full-dress of an ordinary M.A. in the seven-

teenth century, and preserves picturesque old features which have been lost elsewhere.

The proper dress of the mediaeval Master, though probably an undergraduate could also wear it, was the *cappa* or cope; this at Oxford was usually black in colour, but Doctors had quite early (i.e. in the time of the Edwards) adopted as the colour for it some shade of red, thus beginning the custom which still survives. The scarlet 'habit', worn at Convocations by Oxford Doctors over their ordinary gowns, retains the old name '*cappa*', but the shape has been completely altered. The sister University, however, still preserves the old shape; the Cambridge Vice-Chancellor presides at their degree ceremonies in a sleeveless scarlet cloak, lined with miniver, which exactly corresponds to the fourteenth-century picture of our Chancellor receiving the charter from Edward III. 'The gown, the 'putting on' of which is now the distinguishing mark of the taking of the B.A. or M.A., is simply the survival of a mediaeval garment which was not even clerical, the long gown (*toga*) or cassock, which was worn under the *cappa*. The dress of the 'Blues' at Christ's Hospital preserves the gown in an earlier stage of development. The modern usage which gives the gown of the B.A. sleeves, while

(2) The Cope  
and the  
Gown.

that of an M.A. has them cut away, has in some unexplained way grown out of a similar usage as to the mediaeval *cappa*.

(?) The Hood.

The mark, however, which specially distinguished the degree was the hood, as to which the University was always strict, assigning the proper material and the proper colour<sup>1</sup> to that of each faculty. The hood was not a mere adornment or a badge, it was an article of dress. Originally it seems to have been attached to the *cappa*, and, as its name implies, was used for covering (the head) when required. Its practical purpose is quaintly implied in the books of the Chancellor and the Proctors (sub anno 1426), where it is provided that 'whereas reason bids that the varieties of costume should correspond to the ordering of the seasons, and whereas the Festival of Easter in its due course is akin from its nearness to summer,' it is henceforth allowed that from Easter to

<sup>1</sup> This is delightfully commemorated in the old custom of Queen's College, by which, at the Gaudy dinner on Jan. 1st, each guest receives a needle with a silk thread of the colour of his faculty—Theologians black, Lawyers blue, Arts students red—and is bidden 'Take this and be thrifty'. The mending of the hood was a duty which must have often devolved on the poor mediaeval student. The custom dates from the time of the Founder (1340). It is sad that so few colleges have been careful, as Queen's has been, to preserve their old customs.

All Saints' day, 'graduates may wear silken hoods,' instead of fur ones, 'old custom notwithstanding.' The M.A. hood, even in its present mutilated form, still presents survivals of the time when it was a real head covering, survivals which should prevent those who wear it from putting it on upside down, as many often do. The B.A. hood was already in the fifteenth century lined with lamb's wool or rabbit's fur, and the use of miniver by other than M.A.s and persons of birth or wealth<sup>1</sup> was strictly forbidden by a statute of 1432.

The last and not the least important part <sup>(4) The Cap.</sup> of mediaeval academic dress still remains to be spoken of, the cap. The conferring of this with the ring and the kiss of peace has been already mentioned (p. 27), these being the marks of the admission of new Masters and Doctors. As under the Roman Law the slave was manumitted by being allowed to put on a cap, so the '*pileus*' of the M.A. was the sign of his independence; hence he was bound to wear it at all University ceremonies. The cap was sometimes square (*biretta*), sometimes round (*pileus*); Gascoigne

<sup>1</sup> Those of royal blood, the sons of peers and members of Parliament, and those who could prove an income of 60 marks a year, were allowed the privilege of Masters.

(writing in 1456) tells us that in his day the round cap was worn by Doctors of Divinity and Canon Law, and that it had always been so since the days of King Alfred; not content with this antiquity, he also affirms that the round cap was given by God Himself to the doctors of the Mosaic Law. He adds the more commonplace but more trustworthy information that the cap was in those days fastened by a string behind, to prevent its falling off.

The modern stiff corners of the cap are an addition, which is not an improvement; the old cap drooped gracefully from its tuft in the centre, as can still be seen in the portraits of seventeenth-century divines, e. g. in Vandyck's 'Archbishop Laud', so familiar from its many replicas and copies. Later usage has specialized the round cap of velvet as belonging to the Doctors of Law and Medicine, and a most beautiful head-gear it is; it is preserved, in a less elaborate form, at the degree ceremony in the round caps of the Bedels.

After the Reformation the cap began to be worn by B.A.s and undergraduates, but originally without the tuft; the eighteenth century, careless of the old traditions, replaced the tuft by the modern commonplace tassel, and extended this to all caps except

those of servitors. With the disappearance of social distinctions in dress, the tassel has been extended to all, except to choir-boys, and so the coveted badge of the mediaeval Master is now the property of all University ranks, and is undervalued and neglected in the same proportion as it has been rendered meaningless.

Before leaving the subject of head-gear, it may be noted that the old University custom of giving the son of a nobleman a gold tassel for his cap has left a permanent mark in the familiar phrase 'tuft-hunting'; the right of wearing this distinctive badge still exists for peers and for their eldest sons<sup>1</sup>, but they are at liberty not to avail themselves of it, and it is practically never used. Academic dress has sadly lost its picturesqueness, especially for the undergraduate; his gown no longer reaches to his heels, as the statute still requires it to do, and the injunction against '*novi et insoliti habitus*' is surely a dead letter in these days when Norfolk jackets and knickerbocker suits penetrate even to University and college lecture-rooms. But what can the University expect when M.A.s, in evasion of the statutes, come to Congregation without gowns, and

<sup>1</sup> i. e. if they are admitted by a college as 'noble-men', and are entered on the books as such.

borrow them from each other in order to vote, and when the University itself knows nothing of the 'exemplaria' (models) which are supposed to be 'in archivis reposita'? Whether there ever were these models of proper University dress, e. g. a doll in D.D. habit, &c., is uncertain; what is certain is that there are none now. At the present time the scanty relics of mediaeval usage are at the mercy of the tailors; and though it must be said for their representatives in Oxford that they do their best to maintain old traditions, yet there is no doubt that innovations are slowly but steadily introduced, e. g. the M.A. hood is losing in length, and is altering in colour.

The recent attempt on the part of the University to devise new gowns and habits for the 'Research' Doctors is, it may be hoped, the beginning of a better state of things; whatever may be thought of the aesthetic success in this case, the subject was treated with seriousness and expert evidence was taken. Perhaps in the near future Oxford may bestir itself in this matter, and see that nothing more is lost of its mediaeval survivals; restoration of what is actually gone is probably hopeless. Such pious conservatism would be in accordance with the spirit of the present age; for even the modern Radical,

unlike his predecessor of half a century back, cares, or at any rate professes to care, for the external traces of the past.

The following list makes no attempt to distinguish between the full dress and the undress of Doctors; it is only intended as a help in identifying the various functionaries who take part in the degree ceremony.

Oxford  
Hoods and  
Gowns.

*Doctors.*

Divinity (D.D.<sup>1</sup>).—Scarlet hood and habit ; the gown has black velvet sleeves.

Civil Law (D.C.L.)	} Scarlet hood and habit ; the gown has sleeves of crimson silk.
Medicine (D.M.)	

The Master of Surgery (M.Ch.) wears the same hood, gown, and habit as an M.D., and ranks next after him.

Science (D.Sc.)	} Scarlet hood and habit ; the gown has sleeves of French grey.
Letters (D.Litt.)	

The habits of these Doctors, though in the main similar, have different facings, that of

<sup>1</sup> The initials S.T.P. (Sanctae Theologiae Professor), so commonly used for Doctors of Divinity on monuments, are simply a survival of the old usage according to which, in the Middle Ages, Doctor, Professor, and Master were synonymous terms for the highest degree. It was only later that 'professor' came to be especially applied to a paid teacher in any subject.

the D.D. being black, of the D.M. and D.C.L. crimson, and of the D.Litt. and D.Sc. French grey.

Doctor of Music (Mus.Doc.).—Gown of crimson and cream brocade. The hood is of the same colours. This gorgeous dress goes back for nearly 300 years. The gown is made of that rich kind of brocade which is popularly said to be able to stand up by itself, and tradition (not very well authenticated) has it that the identically same gown was worn by Richter on his admission as Doctor in 1885, which had been worn by Haydn in the preceding century. The Doctor of Music, however, unlike all other Doctors, ranks after an M.A.; the reason is that musical graduates need not take the ordinary Arts course, but the degrees in Music are open to all who have passed Responsions, or an equivalent examination.

The undress gowns of all Doctors but those of Divinity have the sleeves trimmed with lace; D.D.s wear also a scarf (fastened by a loop behind), and a cassock under their habit or their gown.

All Doctorates are given, or at any rate are supposed to be given, for original work that is a contribution to knowledge; but in the case of the D.D. the theses have quite lost this character.

*The Proctors.*

The Proctors, as the representatives of the M.A.s, wear their old full-dress gown, which has otherwise disappeared from use. The sleeves are of black velvet; the hoods are of miniver, and are passed on from Proctor to Proctor. On the back of the gown is a curious triangular tassel, called a 'tippet'; this is a survival of a bag or purse, which was once used for collecting fees; the appropriateness of its retention by Proctors will still be easily understood by undergraduates. They used also to receive all fees for examinations, till about 1891.

*Master of Arts (M.A.)*

Crimson hood and black gown, with the sleeves cut short and fitting above the elbows, and hanging in a long bag, cut at the end into crescent shape.

*Bachelors.*

Divinity (B.D.).—The hood is black. A scarf is worn, and a cassock also is worn under the gown.

The Bachelor of Divinity is placed here for convenience of reference; but the degree is really higher than that of an M.A. and can only be taken three years after a man has 'incepted' as M.A.

Civil Law (B.C.L.)	} The hoods are blue, trimmed with lamb's wool.
Medicine (B.M.)	
Surgery (B.Ch.)	
Music (B.Mus.)	

The gown of all the above Bachelors has laced sleeves fitting to the arm, like those of the M.A.s, but slit; the bag is straight and also trimmed with lace.

Arts (B.A.).—The hood is trimmed with lamb's wool; the gown has full sleeves, with strings to fasten back.





## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLACES OF THE DEGREE CEREMONY

THE University of Oxford confers its degrees in three rooms, the Sheldonian Theatre, the Divinity School, and the Convocation House; the choice rests with the Vice-Chancellor, and now that, in the last year or so, degree-days have been made less frequent, and there are consequently more candidates on each occasion, the place is often the Sheldonian. This is a great improvement on old custom, for it is the only one of the three buildings which was designed for the purpose, and it is also the only one which gives room for the proper conduct of the ceremony, when the number of candidates is large.

The Sheldonian, therefore, commonly known in Oxford as 'The Theatre', will be spoken of first, although it is the last in date of construction. It is a memorial at once of the munificence of one of the greatest among Oxford's many episcopal benefactors,

The Sheldonian.

and also of the architectural skill of her most eminent architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Down to the time of the Civil War, the ceremony of the 'Act' (cf. p. 27 seq.) at which degrees were conferred, had taken place in St. Mary's; but the influence of the Puritans was beginning to affect all parties, and was causing the growth of a feeling that religious buildings should not be used for secular purposes. John Evelyn, who gives us our fullest account of the opening ceremony at the Sheldonian, notes that it might be thought 'indecent' that the Act should be held in a 'building set apart for the immediate worship of God'<sup>1</sup>, and this was 'the inducement for building this noble pile'. Wren had shown his design to the Royal Society in 1663, and it had been much commended; he was only a little more than thirty years of age, and it was his first public building, but he was already known as that 'miracle of a youth' and that 'prodigious young scholar', and he fully justified the Archbishop's confidence in him. So great was this that Sheldon told Evelyn that he had never seen the building and that he

<sup>1</sup> The buffooneries of the *Terrae Filius*, who was a recognized part of the 'Act', would be even more shocking in a consecrated building than merely secular business.

never intended to do so. Wren showed his boldness alike in the style he chose—he broke once for all with the Gothic tradition in Oxford—and in the skill with which he designed a roof which was (and is) one of the largest unsupported roofs in England. The construction of it was a marvel of ingenious design.

The cost of the whole building was Its Dedi-  
cation. £25,000, as Wren told Evelyn, and architects, even the greatest of them, do not usually over-estimate the cost of their designs; but other authorities place it at £16,000, or even at a little over £12,000. At any rate, it was felt to be, as Evelyn writes, ‘comparable to any of this kind of former ages, and doubtless exceeding any of the present, as this University does for colleges, libraries, schools, students and order, all the universities in the world.’ We may pardon the enthusiasm of one who was himself an Oxford man, after a day on which ‘a world of strangers and other company from all parts of the nation’ had been gathered for the Dedication. The ceremonies lasted two days (July 9 and 10, 1669), and on the first day extended ‘from eleven in the morning till seven at night’; we are not told how long they lasted on the second day. They consisted of speeches, poems,

disputations, and all the other forms of learned gaiety wherein our academic predecessors took such unwearying delight; there was 'music too, vocal and instrumental, in the balustrade corridor opposite to the Vice-Chancellor's seat'. And those who took part had among them some who bore famous names; the great preacher, South, was Public Orator; among the D.D.s incepting were Tillotson, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the first to introduce Modern English into the style of the pulpit, and Compton, who, as Bishop of London, took so prominent a part in the Revolution.

The Roof  
Paintings.

Not the least conspicuous feature in the new building was the paintings by Robert Streater, which had been especially executed for it. In accordance with the idea of Wren, who wished to imitate the uncovered roofs of Greek and Roman theatres, the building, 'by the painting of the flat roof within, is represented as open.' Pepys, who went to see everything, records how he went to see these pictures in Streater's studio, and how the 'virtuosos' who were looking at them, thought 'them better than those of Rubens at Whitehall'; 'but,' Pepys has taste enough to add, 'I do not fully think so.' This unmeasured admiration was, however, out-

done by the contemporary poetaster, Whitehall, who ends his verses on the paintings,

That future ages must confess they owe  
To Streater more than Michael Angelo,

lines in which the grammar and the connoisseurship are about on an equality. The paintings are on canvas fixed on stretchers, and hence have been removed for cleaning purposes more than once ; this was last done only a few years ago (1899-1901). There are thirty-two sections, and the whole painting measures 72 feet by 64. Unfortunately the subject is rendered difficult to understand, because the most important section, which is the key of the whole, representing 'The Expulsion of Ignorance', is practically concealed by the organ ; the present instrument was erected in 1877.

Sheldon's building was designed for a double use. It was to be at once the University Theatre and the University Printing Press, and it was used for the latter purpose till 1714, when the Oxford Press was moved across the quadrangle to the Clarendon Building, designed by Sir John Vanbrugh. The actual printing was done in the roof, on the floor above the painted ceiling. The Theatre is for this reason the mark on all Oxford books printed during

The Sheldonian Press.

the first half-century of its existence. In one respect Archbishop Sheldon was so unlike most Oxford benefactors that his merit must be especially mentioned. Men are often willing enough to give a handsome sum of money down to be spent on buildings; they too often leave to others the charge of maintaining these; but Sheldon definitely informed the University that he did not wish his benefaction to be a burden to it, and invested £2,000 in lands, out of the rents of which his Theatre might be kept in repair. The Sheldonian, thanks to its original donor and to the ever liberal Dr. Wills of Wadham, who supplemented the endowment a century later, has never been a charge on the University revenues.

The Restora-  
tion of the  
Sheldonian.

Unfortunately these repairs have been carried out with more zeal than discretion. Even in Wren's lifetime the alarm was raised that the roof was dangerous (1720), but the Vice-Chancellor of the time was wise enough not to consult a rival architect but to take the practical opinion of working masons and carpenters, who reported it safe. Nearly 100 years later the same alarm was raised, whether with reason or not we do not know, for no records were left; all we do know is that the 'restorers' of the day took Wren's roof off, removed his beautiful

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 85

windows, inserted a new and larger cupola, and generally did their best to spoil his work. It is only necessary to compare the old pictures of the Sheldonian with its present state to see how in this case, as in so many others, Oxford's architectural glories have suffered from our insane unwillingness to let well alone.

The Sheldonian was not in existence during the period when University history was most picturesque. Its associations therefore are nearly all academic, and academic functions, however interesting to those who take part in them, do not appeal to the great world. Perhaps the most romantic scene that the Sheldonian has witnessed was the Installation of the Duke of Wellington as Chancellor in 1833, when the whole theatre went mad with enthusiasm as the writer of the Newdigate, Joseph Arnould of Wadham, declaimed his lines on Napoleon,—

The History  
of the  
Sheldonian.

And the dark soul a world could scarce  
subdue  
Bent to thy genius, chief of Waterloo.

The subject of the poem was 'The Monks of St. Bernard'.

But the enthusiasm was almost as great, and the poetry far superior, when Heber

recited the best lines of the best Newdigate on record:—

No hammer fell, no ponderous axes swung;  
Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.  
Majestic silence.

This happy reference to the manner of building of Solomon's Temple was suggested by Sir Walter Scott.

Another almost historic occasion in the Sheldonian was when, at a Diocesan Conference, the late Lord Beaconsfield made his well-known declaration, 'I for my part prefer to be on the side of the angels.' But these scenes only indirectly touch Oxford. More intimately connected with her history are the famous Proctorial Veto of 1845, when Dean Church and his colleague saved Tract No. 90 from academic condemnation, and the stormy debates of twenty years ago, when the permission to use Vivisection in the University Physiological Laboratory was only carried after a struggle in which the Odium Scientificum showed itself capable of an unruliness and an unfairness to opponents which has left all displays, previous or subsequent, of Odium Theologicum far behind.

There is no doubt that the organized medical vote on that occasion holds the record for noise in the Theatre. And the

## THE DEGREE CEREMONY 87

competition for the record has been and is still severe; every year at Commemoration, we have a scene of academic disorder, which can only be called 'most unbecoming of the gravity of the University', to use John Evelyn's words of the performance of the *Terrae Filius* at the opening of the Sheldonian. It is true that the proceedings of the *Encaenia* have been always able to be completed, since the device was hit on of seating ladies freely among the undergraduates in the upper gallery; this change was introduced in 1876. The disorder of the undergraduates' gallery had culminated in 1874, and in 1875 the ceremony was held in the Divinity School. But the noise is as prevalent as ever, and it must be confessed that undergraduates' wit has suffered severely from the feminine infusion. However, our visitors, distinguished and undistinguished alike, appreciate the disorder, and it certainly has plenty of precedent for it in all stages of University history.

But the Sheldonian has more harmonious associations. Music was from the first a regular feature of the *Encaenia*, and compositions were written for it. The most famous occasion of this kind was in July, 1733, when Handel came to Oxford, at the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor, to conduct the perform-

ance of some of his works ; among these was the Oratorio *Athaliah*, especially written for the occasion. Handel was offered the degree of Doctor of Music, but (unlike Haydn) declined it, because he disliked 'throwing away his money for dat de blockhead wish'.

Convocation  
House.

Till quite recently the degree ceremony was usually held in the Convocation House, which lies just in front of the Sheldonian, under the northern end of the Bodleian Library (the so-called Selden Wing). This plain and unpretentious building, which was largely due to the munificence of Archbishop Laud, was begun in 1635 and finished two years later. It cost, with the buildings above, about £4,200. Its dreary late-Gothic windows and heavy tracery, and the Spartan severity of its unbacked benches, are characteristic of the time of transition, alike architectural and religious, to which it belongs. It has been from that time to this the Parliament House of the University, where all matters are first discussed by the Congregation of resident Doctors and Masters ; it is only on the rare occasions when some great principle is at stake, and when the country is roused, that matters, whether legislative or administrative, are discussed anywhere else ; a Sheldonian debate is fortunately very rare.

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The building is well suited for the purpose Its History. for which it was erected, and so has not unnaturally been used as the meeting-place of the nation's legislators, when, as has several times happened, Parliament has been gathered in Oxford. Charles I's House of Commons met here in 1643, when Oxford was the royalist capital of England; and in 1665, when Parliament fled from the Great Plague, and in 1681, when Charles II fought and defeated the last Exclusion Parliament, the House of Commons again occupied this House. It was on the latter occasion just preparing to move across to the Sheldonian, and the printers there were already packing up their presses to make room for the legislators, when Charles suddenly dissolved it, and so completed his victory over Shaftesbury and Monmouth.

A less suitable use for the Convocation House was its employment for Charles I's Court of Chancery in 1643-4.

For the reasons given above, degree days are now much more important functions than they used to be, and the Convocation House, never very suitable for the ceremony, is now seldom used.

But the Divinity School, which lies at a Divinity School. right angle to the Convocation House, under the Bodleian Library proper, is a room which

by its beauty is worthy to be the scene of any University ceremony, for which it is large enough, and degrees are still often conferred there as well as in the Sheldonian.

The architecture of the School makes it the finest room which the University possesses. It was building through the greater part of the fifteenth century, which Professor Freeman thought the most characteristic period of English architecture; and certainly the strength and the weakness of the Perpendicular style could hardly be better illustrated elsewhere. The story of its erection can be largely traced in the *Epistolae Academicæ*, published by the Oxford Historical Society; they cover the whole of the fifteenth century, and though they are wearisome in their constant harping on the same subject—the University's need of money—they show a fertility of resource in petition-framing and in the returning of thanks, which would make the fortune of a modern begging-letter writer, whether private or public. The earliest reference to the building of the proposed new School of Divinity is in 1423, when the University picturesquely says it was intended 'ad amplianda matris nostrae ubera' (so many things could be said in Latin which would be shocking in English). In 1426 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Chichele, is approached

and asked 'to open the torrents of his brotherly kindness'. Parliament is appealed to, the Monastic Orders, the citizens of London, in fact anybody and everybody who was likely to help. Cardinal Beaufort gave 500 marks, William of Waynflete lent his architectural engines which he had got for building Magdalen—at least he was requested to do so—(1478), the Bishop of London, by a refinement of compliment, is asked to show himself 'in this respect also a second Solomon'. [The touch of adding 'also' is delightful.] The agreement to begin building was signed in 1429, when the superintendent builder was to have a retaining fee of 40*s.* a year, and 4*s.* for every week that he was at work in Oxford; the work was finally completed in 1489. And the building was worthy of this long travail; its elaborate stone roof, with the arms of benefactors carved in it, is a model at once of real beauty and of structural skill.

The Divinity School, as its name implies, was intended for the disputations of the Theological Faculty, and perhaps it was this special purpose which prevented it being used so widely for ordinary business, as the other University buildings were. At any rate it was this connexion which led to its being the scene of one of the most picturesque events in Oxford history; it was to it, on

History of  
the Divinity  
School.

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April 16, 1554, that Cranmer was summoned to maintain his theses on the Blessed Sacrament against the whole force of the Roman Doctors of Oxford, reinforced by those of Cambridge. Single-handed and without any preparation, he held his own with his opponents, and extorted their reluctant admiration by his courtesy and his readiness. 'Master Cranmer, you have answered well,' was the summing up of the presiding Doctor, and all lifted their caps as the fallen Archbishop left the building. It was the last honour paid to Cranmer.

In the eighteenth century, when all old uses were upset, the Divinity School was even lent to the City as a law court, and it was here the unfortunate Miss Blandy was condemned to death. But as a rule its associations have been academic, and it is still used for its old purpose, i. e. for the reading of the Divinity theses. It is only occasionally that University functions of a more general kind are held there, e.g. the famous debates on the admission of women to degrees in 1895. So splendid a room ought to be employed on every possible occasion, and happy are they who, when the number of candidates is not too large, take their degrees in surroundings so characteristic of the best in Oxford.

# APPENDIX I

## THE PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

I. DEGREES are given and examiners appointed by the Ancient House of Congregation. This corresponds to the 'Congregation of Regents' of the Laudian Statutes. Its members are the University officials, the professors, the heads and deans of colleges, all examiners, and the 'necessary regents', i. e. Doctors and Masters of Arts of not more than two years' standing; it thus includes all those who have to do with the conduct, the instruction, or the examination of students. The 'necessary regents' are added, because in the mediæval University the duty of teaching was imposed on Doctors and Masters of not more than two years' standing; others might 'rule the Schools' if they pleased, but the juniors were bound to discharge this duty unless dispensed.

II. Congregation consists of all those members of Convocation who reside within two miles of Carfax, along with certain officials. This body has nothing to do with degrees; it is the chief legislative body of Oxford.

III. Convocation is made up of all Doctors and Masters whose names are on the University's books. It confirms the appointment of examiners, and confers honorary degrees at Commemoration.

It is also the final legislative body of the University, and controls all expenditure.

## APPENDIX II

### THE UNIVERSITY STAVES

THE old University staves, which are now in the Ashmolean Museum at the University Galleries, seem to date from the reign of Elizabeth; they have no hall-marks, but the character of the ornamentation is of that period. No doubt the mediaeval staves perished in the troubles of the Reformation period, along with other University property, and the new ones were procured when Oxford began to recover her prosperity.

Two of the old staves were discovered in 1895 in a box on the top of a high case in the Archives; their very existence had been forgotten, and they were covered with layers of dust. The legend that they had been concealed there by the loyal Bedels must be given up; no doubt they were put away when the present staves were procured in 1723. The third staff was in the keeping of the Esquire Bedel, and was brought to the University Chest, when that office ceased to exist.

The present staves are six in number, three silver and three silver-gilt. The three former are carried by the Bedel of Arts and the two sub-bedels, the three latter are carried by the Bedels of the three higher faculties, Divinity,

Law, and Medicine. All of them date (as is proved by the hall-marks) from 1723, except one of the silver staves, which seems to have been renewed in 1803. The three silver staves bear the following inscriptions:—

No. I. On the top ‘Ego sum Via’; on the base ‘Veritas et Vita’.

No. II. On the top ‘Aequum et Bonum’; on the base ‘Iustitiae Columna’.

No. III. On the top ‘Scientiae et Mores’; on the base ‘Columna Philosophiae’.

The inscriptions are the same on the silver-gilt staves, except that the staff of the Bedel of Divinity has all the mottoes on it—‘Ego sum Via’, ‘Veritas et Vita’ on the top, and the others on the base.

The letters on the bases of all the staves are put on the reverse way to those on the tops; this is because the staves are carried in different ways; before the King and the Chancellor they are carried upright, before the Vice-Chancellor always in a reversed position, with the base uppermost.

It should be noted that they are staves and not maces, as the University of Oxford derives its authority from no external power, but is independent.

The arms on the tops of three of the staves present a very curious puzzle; one roundel bears those of Neville and Montagu quarterly, and seems to be a reproduction of the arms of the Chancellor of 1455, George Neville, the

Archbishop of York; another bears the old Plantagenet 'England and France quarterly' as borne by the sovereigns from Henry IV to Elizabeth; a third the Stuart arms as borne from James I to Queen Anne; yet the work of all three roundels seems to be seventeenth century in character, and does not match that of the rest of the fabric of the staves.

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