HISTORY

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THE BEGINNINGS OF COLLEGES.

BEFORE I speak of the origins of Colleges at our old Universities I have to ask myself a question. It is large, but relevant. What is a University, and what is a College? Or rather, what was the accepted meaning of those names when they were first applied to institutions for the advancement of general learning?

Of course, both words are derived from the Latin through French. Universities and Colleges came to England through French influences at a time when more than half France was in the dominion of Anglo-French kings. Paris was the pit whence Oxford and Cambridge with their Colleges were digged. But while central governments were still in the making, and when nationalities had not attained self-consciousness, there was a power and an attraction ever present to the scholarly mind in the name and tradition of Rome—the Rome of literature and learning and especially of justice, the Rome whose speech was the speech of all constructive thought, whose thought, since the submergence of Greece, was the only shaping spirit that moved on the formless void of barbarism. We first hear of scholars at Cambridge in the year 1209, when there was a great migration hither of clerks of the University of Oxford. Did they find a University here on their arrival? Matthew of Paris does not say so. *Hinc lucem* says the motto of our University. May we not perhaps infer that the lamp was handed to us from Oxford, whose own *illuminatio* was from Paris, as Paris caught the light from the schools of Italy?

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Oxford and Cambridge began, there was no conception that a University was a national institution—much less that it was a local one. The earliest benefactor of Cambridge came from the then anarchically independent country of Ireland—one William of Kilkenny. The scholars of Merton, whose College at Oxford was

the first to be governed by a code of statutes, were allowed to study at any University, and a principal part of their property lay in Cambridge. Duns Scotus, who is said to have been a Fellow, seems to have been an Irishman: he taught at Paris and is said to have died at Cologne. So little had Oxford and Cambridge asserted their position as national institutions in the thirteenth century that nearly all the English scholars of that time had received some part of their education at Paris: Walter Map, Giraldus Cambrensis, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Stephen Langton, were of the number. When Henry III. visited Paris in 1254 the English students went in procession to meet him with tapers and garlands and musical instruments. The statutes of one of our early Colleges, Pembroke, prescribed that a Frenchman was to be preferred to an Englishman in election to a Fellowship. So little is, and was, our University attached to the soil of Cambridge, that it is only due to the poverty of the English language that we call it the University of Cambridge. Latin is more precise. If a King addresses a writ to the townsmen of Cambridge, he styles them "burgesses of Cambridge," *burgenses de Cantebrigia*, and their town is "the town of Cambridge," *villa Cantebrigie*. But if it be the University which he is addressing, he is careful to call it the Cantebrigian University, *Universitas Cantebrigiensis*, just as the neighbouring bishop is *Episcopus Eliensis*, because a bishop is not ascript to the soil, as, e.g., an earl was attached to Kent, *comes de Kancia*, but is a member of the universal episcopate.

But, though Cambridge University is so far universal that it exists wherever there are men accredited to teach by the licence of its degree, *Universitas* did not, in its original application, imply that its sphere was universal and ubiquitous. That was rather the implication of *Generale Studium*, which in the Middle Ages was the common designation of such teaching bodies. In Roman law language *Universitas* meant simply "a corporation," any body of men associated for purposes civil or religious. The word requires a genitive to give it particularity, and an organised teaching body is a *Universitas Scholarum*, a corporation of scholars.

The curious thing about this ubiquitous University in its infant days was that it had no real property at all. Its scholars, always prepared for flight to Stamford or Northampton, lived wherever they could, in lodgings or boarding-houses; its teaching went on in hired premises, and its deliberations and exercises in a parish church, where it had not even a patron's privilege. It

is the essence of a College from the outset that it has buildings of its own, and lands and rents to provide its revenues. The College lived on alms, the University on fees. It was an afterthought, which was not suggested until the sixteenth century, to subsidise University teachers with endowment. It was an afterthought of about the same date for Colleges to accept students who paid for their board and education. The existence of this class, called at Cambridge "pensioners," is ignored in the statutes of primitive Colleges. Another fundamental difference between the mediæval University and College was that the University required its certificated members to teach in its schools for some time after graduation : the earlier Colleges did not undertake to teach at all.

Rome and the municipal towns allied to it had many *collegia* : colleges of Government officials, consuls, tribunes, etc. ; colleges of priests and augurs ; colleges of merchants and artisans. The word *collegium* means no more than an association of colleagues. The College so far resembled a *collegium* that the members of either body had a common and limited purpose—study in the case of the College ; also that either of them was a select society, all of whose members were included in the larger unit of the State, the municipality or the University, but were under the governance of ordinances in the framing of which the larger corporation had no voice. Like the guilds of Bacchanals at Rome, the College had its independent *magister*, its common funds, its common secrets, which Fellows on their admission took oath not to reveal to anyone outside their community. But there the resemblance ended. The University was a gild or trades union ; the College was not. The benefits of a mediæval craft or religious gild were mutual to its members and maintained by their common contribution ; the members of the College furnished nothing to the joint stock, and while all of them received alms, they gave none.

Remark that this word "College" was originally applied to a society of men, not to the buildings which they occupied. In early documents a careful distinction is made between the *collegium*, consisting of scholars, and the house, *domus*, or hall, *aula*, which they inhabited. The first college buildings were known as the House of St. Peter, or the Hall of the Scholars of the Bishops of Ely. The next was the House of St. Michael, and then followed Clare Hall, King's Hall, Pembroke Hall, Gonville Hall, the House of Corpus Christi, God's House.

Here we have some light on the origin of college buildings. Our first College, Peterhouse, was founded in 1284. Within

sixty-eight years of that date no fewer than eight endowed Colleges had come into existence at Cambridge, the latest being Corpus in 1352. Hardly a trace of the architectural work of that period is to be found in any of the eight. The reason is not so much that buildings of collegiate type have been destroyed. They hardly existed, except in cases where Colleges, such as Peterhouse and Trinity Hall, inherited fragments of an earlier monastic establishment. The complete College plan, with chapel, hall, chambers and offices disposed about a quadrangle, dates only from the latter part of the fifteenth century.

Let us consider the conditions and needs of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries which College founders had in view. Their aims were entirely eleemosynary—to aid the poor scholar by providing him with lodging and the necessities of life, and by putting him under the guidance of a senior Master to protect his inexperience from profiteering townsmen. The beneficiaries were secular, not attached to monastic institutions. Stately chapels and large halls were neither necessary nor desirable: the seclusion of cloister studies was unapt for the emancipated clerk whose lectures were anywhere but in his own household; large libraries were not to be compassed by the scholar whose business was to read, not to transcribe, books. The name given to the dwelling-place, House or Hall, implies that it was an ordinary house, acquired by purchase, and it needed little or no adaptation to fit it for the uses of scholars. Bishop Balsham acquired two hostels, *hospitia*, for his Peterhouse scholars; for the seven clerks of Michaelhouse the founder, Hervey de Stanton, purchased a house in St. Michael's Lane, now Trinity Lane; the original scholars of Clare were planted in two houses which had been the property of the University, probably as hostels; the house of a certain Robert de Croyland was large enough to accommodate the thirty-two scholars of King's Hall; Pembroke Hall, Gonville Hall, Trinity Hall, all took root in previously existing buildings. Before the fifteenth century brick was unknown in Cambridge as a building material, and Barnack stone from Northamptonshire was too expensive to be employed except in churches. We hear, indeed, of exceptional houses of stone, the stone being the hard chalk brought from Cherry Hinton or Burwell, villages near Cambridge. But ordinary houses were constructed of clay and timber and roofed with thatch: one hostel got the name of Tiled Hostel from the singularity of its covering. Houses of such materials fell rapidly to decay, and, as time went on, were replaced by more durable buildings, though little in the way of architectural

design was attempted until Henry VI. founded his College of King's.

It is clear that the sites and, indeed, the actual houses originally assigned to the college scholars had in many cases been previously occupied as University boarding-houses called hostels. You may remember that the two Cambridge clerks in Chaucer's story belonged to a great College which Chaucer calls Soler Hall. But the Oxford scholar, "hendy Nicholas," lodged in a carpenter's house, and this was the earlier plan in Universities before they became organised and disciplined. This system of free quartering suffered from grave disadvantages. The clerks complained of the exactions of the townsmen, the townsmen of the unruliness of the clerks. Riot and bloodshed were the outcome; to stay which, in 1231, the King required the county sheriff to proclaim that no clerk should remain in the University who was not under the care and responsibility of a master of arts. By the same ordinance the King directed that hostels of students should be licensed by a joint committee of graduates and townsmen. This, you will observe, was fifty years before the foundation of Peterhouse. Student hostels in an unlicensed way existed, no doubt, before 1231, but after that time they multiplied exceedingly, and for some centuries they absorbed a far larger number of the scholars than were contained in the few Colleges. In 1278, just four years before Balsham's foundation at Peterhouse, the commissioners of Edward I. made a full and minute return to the King of all the owners of house property in Cambridge. They make no specific mention of hostels, but they show that very many houses in the town were owned by University graduates. Many of them had been held by a succession of graduates, and not a few of them became known, at a rather later time, as hostels. In the next century the business of hostel-keeping, which was limited to graduates, developed on a large scale. Dr. Caius, writing in 1573, enumerates seventeen which he says existed within his recollection, and many more had disappeared before his time. Some of them were large, ranking in population with the larger colleges of their time. All of them ceased to exist about the middle of the sixteenth century, and some of them were merged in colleges, serving as pensionaries, or chambers for pensioners, *i.e.*, persons not on the College foundation.

As hostels had no endowment, and consequently no statutes to govern them, their internal economy was more democratic than that of the Colleges; in some respects the fellow-scholars, as their inmates were called, could override the action of their principal.

But there is evidence in the earliest college statutes that the conditions which they prescribe were in a general way based on the experience afforded by life in hostels. In particular, the plan, universally prevailing in hostels, that the residents elected their own principal was copied in the statutes which leave the choice of Master to the joint occupants of the College. Early founders did not claim the right of advocacy for themselves, their heirs and successors; only at Magdalene and at Trinity, in days of Tudor arrogance, was the nomination given to an individual. Under the old boarding-house plan the function of the principal was simply to attend to the domestic needs and business concerns of the household, and in most early statutes it is prescribed that the Master shall not be concerned with teaching, but devote himself to the daily affairs of the community.

It is likely that all material traces of the old hostels have disappeared, unless possibly some of their masonry is embedded in College fabrics, as, *e.g.*, in the Great Court of Trinity. Several, whose buildings were more substantial, survived as late as 1592, when John Hamond made his plan of Cambridge, and several of them became ordinary inns. The ancient Castle Inn in St. Andrew's Street stands on the site of one of the oldest hostels, Rudd's Hostel, which was in existence in the year when Peterhouse was founded. But it is plain from the dimensions of their sites, recorded in old deeds, that many of them were ordinary houses fronting a street, and such houses, if they were adjacent to a college, were inevitably removed when colleges began to take quadrangular form. For example, two old hostels which fronted Trumpington Street were destroyed about 1628 when Peterhouse chapel was built; they were possibly the same two in which Balsham quartered his scholars in 1284, when he removed them from the Hospital of St. John. Garret Hostel and Ovyng's Inn, which had served as pensionaries to Trinity, lasted until the close of the sixteenth century.

The history of the evolution of the quadrangular plan in Cambridge colleges is interesting. It is quite distinct from that which was usual at Oxford after Wykeham's foundation of New College. The stereotyped Cambridge arrangement, of which familiar examples are seen in the principal courts of Queens', Christ's, St. John's and Trinity, was only arrived at after previous experiment and at a time when the uses of Colleges had been modified and Founders recognised their extended needs. Professor Willis, part author of *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge*, was of opinion that the usual quadrangular plan was

derived from the great mansions of the fifteenth-century aristocracy, and in support of his view he selected Haddon Hall, in Derbyshire, as furnishing a striking parallel in its plan to the original court of Queens'. The resemblance between them is certainly very close, but it would be a historical mistake to suppose that the designer of Queens' went to Haddon or any other baronial hall for his pattern. Queens', though its arrangement is the outcome of the experience of an earlier age, is the erection of one time and a single designer. Of the buildings surrounding the main court at Haddon, some are of earlier, some of later, date than the entrance court of Queens'. The planner of Queens' found his suggestion, much nearer than Haddon, in the houses of better-class burghers, such as in several cases had been appropriated to the scholars' uses at Cambridge. A stone's throw from his site was the little court of Pembroke—the smallest and earliest College quadrangle at Cambridge. It occupied the site and probably incorporated some of the buildings of a University Hostel, and it may be taken as illustrating the development of a town house into a College quadrangle. Andrew Duket, the first President and perhaps the designer of Queens', was rector of St. Botolph's Church, which stands but a few paces from Pembroke gate. He made it his business at Queens' to improve on the arrangement at Pembroke, which was good enough for 1347, but not good enough for 1448.

In the planning of Cambridge Colleges we recognise three periods :—

I. From 1284 to 1352, including the Colleges beginning with Peterhouse and ending with Corpus. After the Black Death, in 1348, there was a gap of ninety years before College building was resumed at King's, in 1441. Henry VI.'s plan for King's was never carried out, and it did not serve as a model for Colleges founded after it.

II. The Colleges founded between 1448 and 1546, including Queens', Christ's, St. John's, Magdalene and Trinity. Jesus, founded in 1496, inherited monastic buildings, and consequently its cloister court is of the monastic pattern and quite exceptional. In the other Colleges we see a plan which for a century remained unaltered.

III. In 1557, Dr. Caius, when he added a second court to Gonville Hall, adopted a new plan in which one side was not occupied by buildings, but merely closed by a wall. This plan was followed in the original arrangement of Emmanuel and Sidney.

Before we discuss these successive methods of College planning we must take into consideration some local conditions which profoundly influenced them. Dr. Rashdall in his great book, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, described Cambridge as "a marsh town." If there is disparagement in the description, it has, or had, the justification of being true. Cambridge is not, indeed, situated in or very near the Fenland, but the early town was built on a peninsula of relatively high ground within a loop of the river, which periodically overflowed what bank it had and left an uninhabitable marsh on either flank of the peninsula. When Colleges came into existence, at the end of the thirteenth century, nearly all the higher ground was occupied by the houses of townsmen or of religious bodies, and the Colleges, if they were not outside the borough limits, had perforce to find themselves sites on the less eligible lower parts; and when they began to build in a permanent way they artificially raised the soil to create dry sites. In this way most of the ground between the river and the High Street (now Trinity Street and King's Parade) has been heightened by several feet.

Three main thoroughfares ran along the high or heightened ground, viz., the present St. Andrew's Street, the High Street and a street called Milne Street, which began at the front of Queens' and ended at the south-west corner of the Great Court of Trinity. It is important to remember that all these streets ran roughly north and south.

Milne Street was not, like the other two streets, an arterial road; it began and ended nowhere in particular, and, as it was carried along the raised ground, it was obviously of later construction than the others. None of the Colleges before Pembroke had their entrance in the High Street or St. Andrew's Street. They were built either along Milne Street or in cross lanes which ran from the High Street towards the river. Peterhouse, Michaelhouse, Gonville Hall, King's Hall, were all located in such cross lanes, and their entrances were from the north or the south. None of these Colleges in their first days had chapels of their own. Peterhouse and Michaelhouse satisfied their wants by using parish churches. When Gonville Hall built itself a chapel, c. 1393, its orientation necessitated the placing of it in the range facing the Gate of Entrance. The chapel of King's Hall, built seventy years later, was placed anomalously outside the principal court.

The student household, whether College or hostel, was contained in domestic buildings of ordinary kind, but naturally larger

than the ordinary in most cases. Let us see what such a building in Cambridge might be like in the fourteenth century. Fortunately from contemporary evidence we can make some kind of picture of a house, originally the dwelling of a well-to-do townsman, which was adapted to the uses of a scholar community. One of the Colleges which were suppressed in 1546 and incorporated in Trinity was King's Hall, which at that date occupied the northern part of the Great Court. When Edward III. founded it in 1337 he placed his thirty-two scholars in a house which he purchased for the purpose from a certain Robert de Croyland, who was apparently a graduate of the University and rector of Oundle. From the accounts of the first year of the newly established College we can gather the distribution of its several parts. They together formed a three-sided quadrangle entered from the south by a gateway which had a room above it, but no tower. The side next the street was vacant, except for the gatehouse. Facing the entrance and next to the kitchen was the hall, and on the left side on entering the court was the dwelling of the Master. The other parts were occupied by students' chambers. Such a house, of course, had no chapel.

In this simple structure we see the constituent elements of the early College, which by a process of evolution ultimately brought about the arrangement which became typical in Cambridge Colleges in the century beginning 1448. We need pay no regard to secondary courts which were added at later dates. The original court contained all the buildings which were indispensable to the common life. The Colleges of the first type had no gate-towers and no chapels. For their devotions the scholars were statutably tied to some neighbouring church. Sometimes a gallery containing a chapel connected church and College, as St. Peter's Church was attached to Peterhouse and St. Benet's to Benet (otherwise Corpus) College. There are still examples in English country villages of access by a covered way from a manor-house to a church, and they were once commoner than now.

Pembroke Hall, one of the latest of the Colleges of the first type, shows a transitional stage in court planning. Its first chapel, on the north side of the quadrangle, was inconveniently placed with its eastern wall separating it from the kitchen. The southern side of the court, which was the natural position for the chapel, was probably occupied by the hostel buildings in which the scholars were placed when the College was founded. At Oxford the arrangement, seen at New College and copied in

Colleges of later date, was to place hall and chapel in the same wing, the east wall of the chapel separating it from the dais end of the hall. This plan was never adopted at Cambridge, where the east wall of the chapel, except at Pembroke, always contained a large window. At all times in College planning the position of the kitchen was a crucial factor. Obviously it must be placed at one end or other of the hall, and it was equally necessary that it should be approached by a side lane, so as to avoid the delivery of goods at the front gate. The kitchen must be on that side of the hall where there is a side lane.

In Colleges of the second type we see a systematic plan which was usually carried out at one time—not by the gradual and more or less fortuitous process which prevailed in the earlier days. The constituent parts fit themselves into the most convenient places. The gate is opposite the screens passage at Queens', St. John's and Magdalene; at Christ's, the screens being necessarily in the angle of the court, this arrangement is not possible; and at Trinity the Great Gate, being a legacy from King's Hall, is in an anomalous position in relation to the court. The kitchen is next the side lane, and the hall adjoins it and therefore fronts the gate. The chapel is right or left on entering the court, according as the entrance is from east or west. For the convenience of the Master, his lodging is between the chapel and hall, and it usually has an external turret staircase descending from the upper floor to the court or garden. The Combination Room is usually at the dais end of the hall, remote from the kitchen.

The newer Colleges, Emmanuel and Sidney, abandoned the traditional arrangement in their first plan. Each of them inherited some relics of conventual buildings, and the convenience of building on old foundations, rather than Protestant perversity, suggested the placing of their chapels with axis north and south. But the practical advantage of the old plan was so evident that both Colleges in process of time had to remove or reconstruct a good deal of their buildings. In their purely domestic and secular type Cambridge Colleges reflect the practical habit of the Cambridge mind. Burghers we were and burghers we remain. This is a difference obvious and characteristic between Oxford and Cambridge.

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