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Oxford Nearly Fifty Years Ago.

By an M.A. of Oxford.

THOUGH University life probably changes less than most things, there must be some alteration in manners and customs and speech in nearly half a century. A few reminiscences of life in the sixties may be interesting. I[1] matriculated in October, 1868, on the same day as Bishop Hannington. Like all freshmen of that day, I set to work to read for "Smalls." In that October the standard was unexpectedly raised, and scholars of Balliol and of other colleges, as well as humble commoners, like myself, were ploughed. It was commonly reported that Mr. Gladstone had years before failed in this examination. I heard of a man who, having failed himself, wrote to ask him if it was true that he was "ploughed in Smalls." His secretary replied that he was requested by Mr. Gladstone to inform him that "he did not fail to satisfy the examiners in Responsions."

A curious thing happened at this particular October examination. A commoner of one college arranged to read with a scholar of another college in the Christmas vacation. They were both in for Responsions, and left together to read before the result was announced. When the news reached them, it informed them that the pupil had passed and the coach had failed!

At one time I coached with Mr. Morfill, the well-known coach of that day and after. As I stayed up for an Easter vacation, he very kindly took me once a week during that time. One day he gave me an ode of Anacreon, and told me to turn Herrick's "Thine eyes the glowworms lend thee" into the same metre. He said he would do another set, and we could see which was the best. Of course, there was no question on this point; but he had not noticed that the first line of the Anacreon

[1] Will the reader excuse the first person? It is more graphic.

ode was an exception in scansion, and all his stanzas were wrong in the first line. He said the two combined would make a good set. He was very amused with a Latin line of parody I wrote, "Cantavit juvenis coram proctore togatus," and added for the beginning of the next line, "Cum pileo."

I took some verses to Professor Conington, the famous Latin scholar, and have his corrections with his initials "J. C." Towards the end of my third year I found that if I could pass in the six books of Euclid, I could take my degree a year sooner than I expected. I had six days before me, and as I had done them all at school, I ground up a book a day and went in for the examination. At that time there was viva voce as well as written work in Euclid. I sat before that awful (I use the word literally) wide table, with its dark blue cloth so well (and tremblingly) known to Oxford men, and overheard this conversation: "I do not think he has done enough," said one examiner. "He has done all right in the fourth book," said the other. "Well, let us try him with one more." I knew that proposition well. I got my testamur and my degree, and set to work to read for Law and History, then united in one school. I remember asking a tutor of my college how the examiners studied such a book as Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion." He said that they got up the index. I did the same. Instead of reading it through, I studied all the headings in the index with the references. The paper on Clarendon was the best I did.

The only time I was proctorized was after I became a Bachelor. The Proctor was shy, and when I told him I was a B.A. he did not know what to do. He took my name and college, and the next day wrote me a polite note asking me to call on him. This was at a different time from the ordinary men who were to see him as Proctor. He said that though I was a Bachelor, I was still *in statu pupillari*, and that if he found me without cap and gown again he would fine me.

In our college a long Latin grace was said in Hall by one of the scholars. On several occasions there was no scholar present. Sometimes one of the Fellows would say "Benedictus

benedicat," but sometimes they waited, and it fell to me twice, as the senior, to read the grace. This was not an easy thing to do. The scholars always gabbled the words as fast as they possibly could, and the words looked quite different in print from what they sounded when thus read. The old porter-custodian of all the good—and bad—old customs said that for thus reading grace as a Bachelor I could claim from the Bursar a bottle of the college's best port. I did not make the claim.

A man was sconced—*i.e.*, fined a quart of beer—if he talked shop, or quoted Latin, etc., in Hall. If he could drink off the whole quart at one draught, he could fine his sconcer double. I saw two men do this, and a most disgusting sight it was. A great deal of drunkenness took place at wine-parties and on other occasions. I once (only) attended a bump supper. I left early, as a song was sung I did not like. I heard afterwards that every man at the supper, with my single exception, was up before the college authorities for disorderly conduct. I hope and believe that things are considerably improved in this direction.

We had chapel, of course, and were expected to attend once a day; a sermon was preached now and then.

The head of the college invited each undergraduate to breakfast once a term. Oh the horror of that ordeal! How thankful were we to the Barnabas among us who was the chief speaker, and who got us on the subject of the circulation of "A Row in Dame Europa's School." This was the time of the Franco-Prussian War, and that brochure had a tremendous vogue. We took some little share in preparing lint and bandages for the wounded. When the militia assembled in the city, some of us would help at the teas and services given to them. One Sunday the Bishop preached at a service in the Town Hall, and had to do this before the prayers. He exhorted the men to stay. *One* man dared to get up and go out, and was followed by nearly half the men.

City friends would sometimes ask us to "perpendiculars,"

which were crowded evening parties, and gained their name from the fact that all men had to stand. Stiff old dons would occasionally invite us to a stiff breakfast party. Cards were left on the host the next day or day after. Mr. Christopher would sometimes send out invitations to an "at home" to hear some good speaker; they were marked "we do not dress," and astounding replies sometimes came from those who did not appreciate the good Rector of St. Aldate's efforts. On one occasion the house was so crowded that men had to sit up the stairs, and one was, so it was alleged, found asleep on one of the beds of a bedroom.

At the 'Varsity Sermon we had many good preachers, such as Bishop Wilberforce (Soapy Sam), Bishop Alexander, Dean Stanley, Dr. Pusey, who was then a great power in Oxford. One of the most effective I remember was Thomas Leigh Claughton, Bishop of Rochester. In the course of a sermon he told of a young officer who wrote to his mother from the battlefield, and said: "I was not afraid, for I knew you were praying for me at home." I noticed that many an undergraduate wiped his eyes with the back of his hand that morning. I had the great pleasure of telling the Bishop the effect of his sermon.

Dear old Mr. Christopher (not then Canon) was at St. Aldate's with his Saturday prayer-meeting, which was well attended. His famous Missionary Breakfast had been established some years. I attended it in 1869-70-71-72. It was then held at the Clarendon Hotel. Canon Linton was Rector of St. Peter-le-Bailey. A missionary prayer-meeting was held at his house every Friday afternoon. The name of Bishop French and his colleague, Rev. J. W. Knott, always came in. The Canon gave away valuable books, which we were called forward to choose from, and, I fear, grab at. Canon Linton was, so I heard from a niece of his, the original of a well-known story: An undergraduate met him one day, and greeted him so cordially that the Canon invited him home to lunch, though he could not remember his name and did not like to ask it.

After lunch the Canon offered him a book. The man asked him to write his name in it. "And how do you spell your name?" "Oh, without an 'e.'" The name was Brown.

Bazeley of Brazenose and J. G. Watson of Worcester and others would have open-air services at the Martyrs' Memorial. It was on one of these occasions, when a 'Varsity man had interrupted, that Bazeley gave out so beautifully:

> "If some poor wand'ring child of Thine
> Have spurn'd to-day the voice Divine,
> Now, Lord, the gracious work begin;
> Let him no more lie down in sin!"

The chief Christian work then carried on by undergraduates was teaching in the Sunday-schools and working a Tract District—I had the privilege of sharing one for a little while with the present Bishop of Liverpool. There was then no O.I.C.C.U., nor Oxford Pastorate, nor Missionary Campaigns, nor Children's Special Service Missions to take part in. We carried on, with more or less success, a daily prayer-meeting, and in college some of us had a weekly meeting for prayer and study of the Bible. On one occasion some eighteen or twenty of us met one evening in the rooms of one of our number. Two men came quietly up and sported the oak. We rushed to the door to try to open it. They held it with their feet. It was in the month of November, and one of them put a lighted cracker through the slit for letters. Fortunately, this was seen and extinguished before it exploded close to our faces. The two men outside could not hold out against so strong a force. They gave way. We pursued them across the quad and through the gate into the garden, which happened to be open. Someone told the porter that the garden gate had been left open. He locked it, and unconsciously imprisoned the two men. From my room I heard one of them begging the man in the room above mine to lend him a hand in climbing up the ivy so that he might get back into college. This was, perhaps, not a very creditable bit of our muscular Christianity.

The chief exercises were rowing, cricket, fives, and football. There were no bicycles. Lawn tennis made its appearance towards the end of my time. I never played at Oxford. Golf was unknown in England except at Blackheath. I used to do a good deal of sculling. When first I went out in a canvas skiff and came back without mishap, I was expected to pay one shilling that the men at Salter's might drink my health. One time I was coming back in a skiff, and had reached the awkward bit where the upper river flows into the lower, when a town eight came along. I saw they were running into me. I shouted, "Look ahead, sir!" But it was all of no avail. They ran into my rowlock, knocking the sculls out of my hands. I quite expected an upset, but I managed to recover my sculls and to pull in. All this was in sight of Salter's. The boatmen saw that this was the townsmen's fault. As I got no bill for the damage done to the boat, I thought they had sent it to the Town Boat Club. However, about six years after I had gone down I got a bill, "To damage to one boat, 10s."

Among my contemporaries I can remember the Bishop of Coplestone, who was President of the Union; Arthur W. Poole, who became first Bishop of Japan; E. N. Hodges, Bishop of Travancore and Cochin; Jayne of Jesus, now Bishop of Chester; and Chavasse, Bishop of Liverpool. One man who was spoken of as likely to make his mark was "Asquith of Balliol." I do not think we indulged in those days in the very extensive slang used by 'Varsity men now. We did not talk about "Brekker's and Lekkers," and we certainly should not have called the Prince of Wales—King Edward of loving memory—when he was up just before our time, Pragger Wagger.

These fragmentary reminiscences may remind some senior men of old Oxford days, and may give younger ones some idea of what happened in their 'Varsity nearly fifty years ago.