

Reformation Oxford as it was

“**F**AREWELL, FAREWELL, DEAR OXFORD ; GOD BLESS THEE AND increase thy sons in number, holiness, and virtue.” With these words did Queen Elizabeth take leave of the university. She visited it twice, and enjoyed herself enormously on each occasion. She had listened to speeches in Greek and Latin, and had answered them in the same tongues ; she had sat through days of disputation on philosophy and theology ; she had attended indefatigably at banquets, sacraments, and masques. It was a place after her own heart, and she repaid the fulsome compliments of the university with a good share of her royal favour. Her favourite Dudley ¹ was made Chancellor, and under his regime the university achieved its formal incorporation and a considerable increase in its powers. But none the less Oxford was rigidly compelled into conformity with the new religious settlement. The Queen’s policy was one of compromise and moderation ; but the compromise itself was a Procrustes’ bed in which all must lie whether it suited them or not. The visitation of Bishop Horne was not as savage as that of the earlier commissioners ; but it was severe upon the new-glazed windows and new-tuned organs of Mary’s time. Oxford was at the outset of Elizabeth’s reign the very citadel of the Catholic faith in England. When the Mass became illegal, and later when every member of the university was required to subscribe to the 39 Articles, Oxford began to lose some of its finest men—men such as Edmund Campion of the new College of St. John the Baptist, some of whom departed to the Continent, while others nobly risked their lives to keep their faith alive in England.

Nevertheless, no more colleges were suppressed under Elizabeth, not even the two new Popish colleges of Mary’s reign. One new

¹ Dudley’s wife, Amy Robsart, was buried in St. Mary’s Church after her mysterious death at Cumnor, just outside Oxford. His own chaplain preached the sermon, and “tripped once or twice in his speech by recommending to their memories that virtuous lady ‘so pitifully murdered’ instead of ‘so pitifully slain.’”

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college was founded, nominally by Elizabeth herself; this was Jesus College, the particular home of Welsh students, set up in 1571 by Hugh ap Rice upon a site allotted by the Queen.

Oxford's outstanding benefactor in Queen Elizabeth's time was Sir Thomas Bodley, a member of her diplomatic service and formerly a proctor of the university. Bodley was a great lover of books, and in his retirement he took pity upon the desolate condition of Duke Humphrey's Library, whose empty walls, denuded even of their shelving, disgraced the lovely room above the Divinity School. In 1598 he took this work in hand, and four years later the first part of the "Bodleian" Library was opened. Over a century had passed since Duke Humphrey's manuscripts had been first moved in; the flood of print had begun, in a small way, to inundate the world; and a single room no longer sufficed to hold the university's books. Bodley therefore planned an extension of his library to the east, over the "Proscholium," the arcade before the entrance of the Divinity School which had since the visitation of 1550 been used as a pig-market. This extension, known as the "Arts End," was completed in 1612. In the next year Bodley died, leaving a large endowment for the purpose of rebuilding all the university schools which stood to the east of his library. Within seven years of his death the whole of the present Schools Quadrangle was finished, and the Schools Tower was fittingly adorned with the effigy of a new monarch flatteringly situated between Religion and Fame.

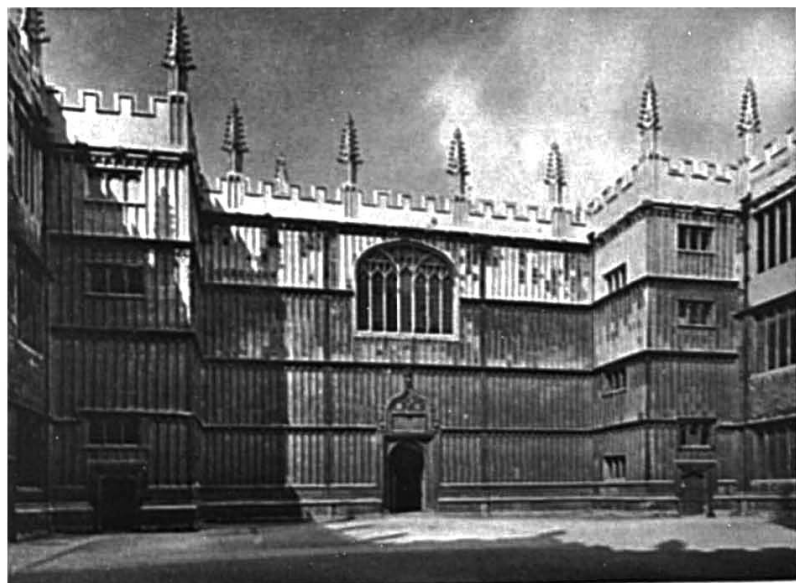
James I was immensely proud of his own peculiar scholarship, and when he visited Oxford was pleased to crack elaborate scholastic jokes.¹ Two more colleges were founded in his reign. One Nicholas Wadham, a Somersetshire gentleman, bequeathed a sum of money for this purpose. In 1610, his widow founded Wadham College on the site of the former Augustinian friary outside the city walls, and the new buildings were completed three years later. In 1624, one Thomas Tisdall of Abingdon took over a well-known hall in St. Aldate's, and founded it anew as Pembroke College, named after the then Chancellor, Lord Pembroke, who is sometimes identified with the "Mr. W. H." of Shakespeare's sonnets.

The Jacobean period was distinguished in Oxford not only for its new additions to the university, but for an extraordinary activity in the rebuilding of old colleges. No visitor to Oxford can fail to notice that the colleges are mostly built in a style quite peculiar to the place. It is a kind of domesticated Gothic, small in scale and repetitive in detail, extremely well suited to the soft Headington stone and to the purpose of academic lodgings. The

¹ James lacked his predecessor's appetite for masque and pageant. "I marvel what they think me to be," he observed on waking from a long sleep during his third Oxford entertainment in three days.



36 The Bodleian : Duke Humphrey's Library (*Ackermann's "Oxford"*)



37 The Bodleian Quad



38 Wadham Chapel (*Ackermann's "Oxford"*)



39 Wadham : the Parks Road Front

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perfection of this style is undoubtedly to be seen in Wadham, which was built by masons sent from the Wadham estates in Somerset. As if in admiration of this complete architectural success, half a dozen other colleges set about pulling down their mediæval structures and building afresh. The most characteristic parts of Jesus, Lincoln, and Exeter all belong to this period ; Oriel was entirely rebuilt in exact imitation of the Wadham plan ; a few years later the reconstruction of University College was begun. But the most ambitious undertaking was the new Jacobean work at St. John's, possibly executed by Inigo Jones, but certainly commissioned by the great William Laud.

This man was, so far as Oxford is concerned, the Waynflete or Wolsey of the sixteenth century. His great career began at St. John's, where he was successively scholar, fellow, and President. From Oxford he passed on to great ecclesiastical advancements. Under Charles I he became Archbishop ; but he combined with these duties those of a very active Chancellor of the university. He gave to Oxford the same strict and sometimes galling supervision which he gave to the Church. He promulgated a body of Statutes which were designed not only to bind the university irrevocably to the new church establishment, but also to regulate the conduct of its members in the minutest particulars. They were to "abstain from that absurd and assuming practice of walking publicly in boots" ; to be fined 6s. 8d. for wearing curls or immoderately long hair ; to avoid houses where women of ill or suspected fame were harboured ; to keep away from all houses where wine or tobacco was sold, on pain of being flogged in public if under eighteen years old ; to retire to their colleges before nine ; to abstain from "dibs, dice, and cards," and from hunting wild animals with hounds, ferrets, nets or toils, and from "all parade and display of guns and cross-bows, and from the use of hawks for fowling." They were not to play football, or cudgel-play, particularly in the public streets ; nor to challenge each other to fight ; nor to drive themselves in any vehicles ; nor to carry any offensive or defensive arms, except when setting out upon or returning from a journey to parts remote, or excepting parties who carry bows and arrows for fair amusement's sake. Laud's restrictions did not stop short at the members of his university. He claimed for his proctors a right of search in the townsmen's houses ; he bade all keepers of inns and taverns to repair their back walls and stop up any mazy winding walks in their back areas or gardens ; he provided that all stage-players, rope-dancers or fencers coming to the university for gain's sake should be imprisoned.

Laud was a great churchman, but a busybody of the first order, as these alarming statutes would prove even without his record as a statesman. However, he was a very good friend to his own

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college. In his day as President it had consisted of a single quadrangle. It was he who added the "Canterbury" Quadrangle beyond. In it he adhered to the modest scale of the period, but he adorned it over and above with an elaborate colonnade, and it is quite conceivable that for this work he called in the talents of Inigo Jones, who would have been well known to him at Court. Proud he was to entertain his King and Queen and young Prince Rupert in his handsome new library, to join the arms of his see of Canterbury with the royal arms, to make Rupert a Master of Arts, and to order Le Sueur to cast fine statues of Charles and Mary to commemorate the scene.¹

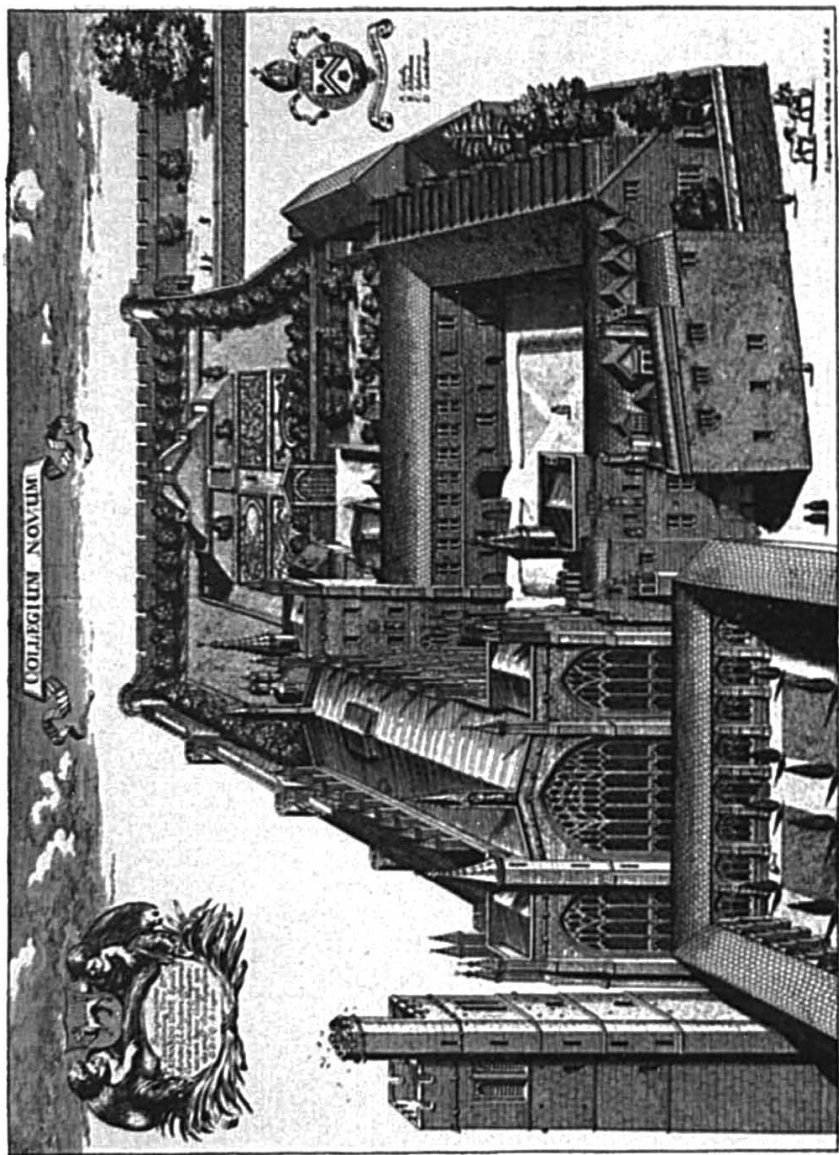
In another ten years Laud's head was off; and both Charles and the Queen had seen far more of Oxford than they wanted to. But the few peaceful years of the reign gave Oxford another two of its most charming memorials. One of the minor statesmen of the day, Lord Danby, converted the old Jews' burial-ground, down by the Cherwell and facing Magdalen, into a botanical garden, more properly known as the Physick Garden, since its primary object was the study and cultivation of herbs. And in the heart of Oxford a further extension was made to the Bodleian. Bodley had left it in the shape of a great T: this was converted into the shape of an H by adding a further wing. The space below it was used to accommodate the two ruling bodies of the university—Convocation and Congregation—whose debates were hither transferred from the dark crypt beside St. Mary's Church.

Scarcely was the roof set upon this last building than England felt the first shocks of a civil war which was to bring Oxford into special prominence. The strategic importance which the Saxons had discovered in the place was suddenly revived after centuries of peace. This importance was not immediately recognised; for the first fate of Oxford was to fall unresisting into the hands of a small Parliamentary force in September 1642. These warriors did little damage. They stole some plate and burnt some Popish books; and then their eyes beheld a horrible spectacle, truly shocking to good Christians—an image of Christ's mother. This "very scandalous statue" was not only an outrage to their feelings, but a painful reminder of Archbishop Laud. For the image had been erected by Laud's own chaplain, who spent a sum of £280 in building a new porch for St. Mary's. It is a glorious piece of work, this porch, Oxford's only baroque achievement, and all the finer from its juxtaposition to the chaste perpendicular of the

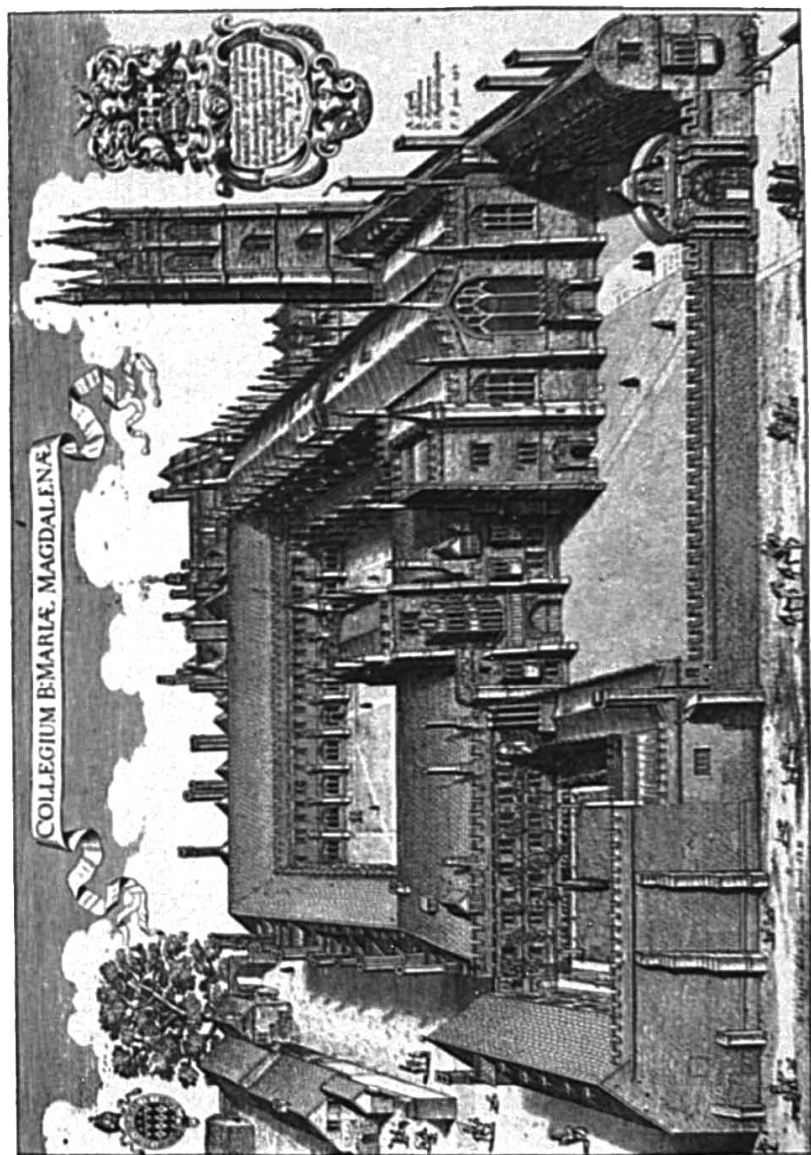
¹ Though entertained at St. John's, Charles adhered to royal tradition by sleeping at Christ Church. Anthony Wood, aged 18, was "conveyed in a servant's arms to the lodgings of Dr. Thomas Iles, Canon of Christ Church; whence being conveyed to the mount in his garden looking into Fish Street [St. Aldate's] he saw the king, queen and the rest riding down the said street into Ch. Ch. great quadrangle. . . . Such a glorious train as that was, he would often talk of when he was a man."



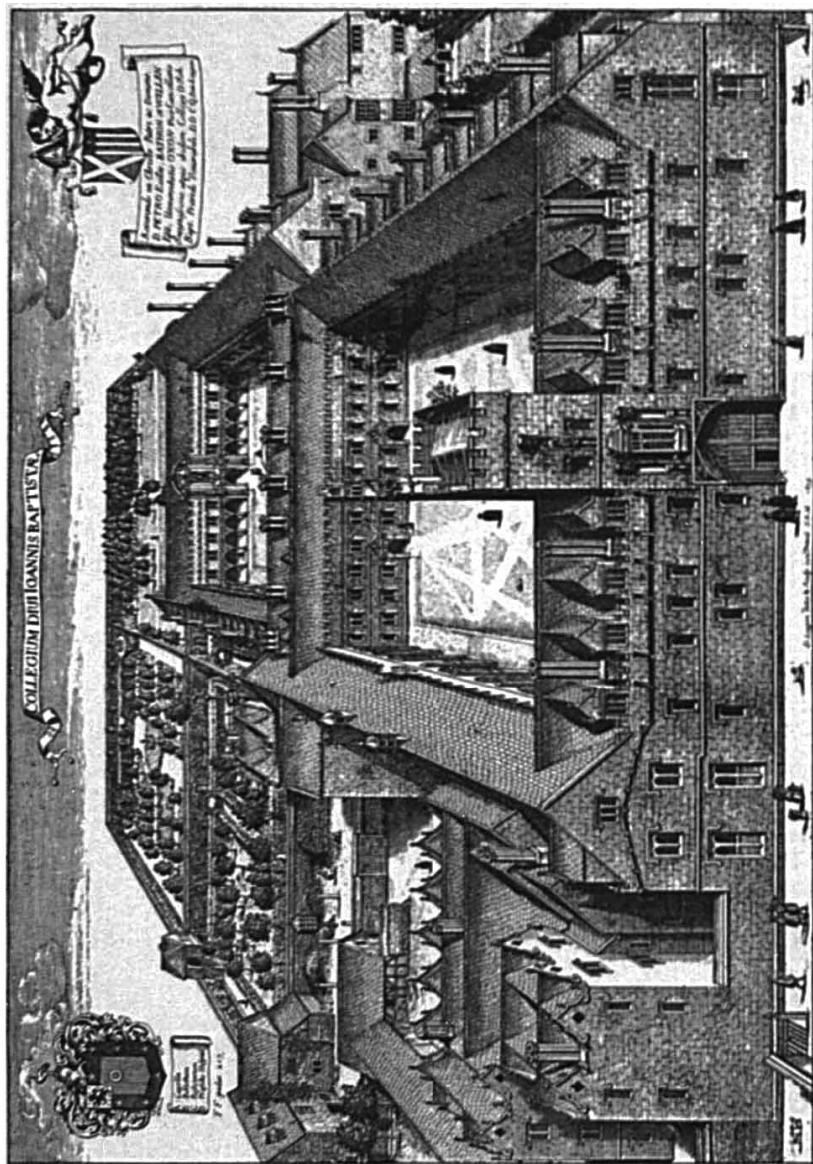
40 Merton : from Loggan's *Cronia Illustrata* (1675)



41 New College : from Loggan's *Oronia Illustrata* (1675)



42 Magdalen : from Loggan's *Oronia Illustrata* (1755)



43 St. John's : from Loggan's *Oxonia Illustrata* (1675)

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church itself. Its columns writhe in exuberance, its pediment breaks into gay scrolls; winged angels surmount it all; and the serene Mother and Child occupy their central niche. Such an image, the Parliamentarians considered, was sufficient proof of the nature of Laud's protestantism. Their informers reported that one passer-by had been seen to bow to the image, while another appeared to pray to it. It was enough. Among the heads of Laud's impeachment was solemnly included a charge founded upon the countenance which he had given to this work. And seeing it before their eyes, the troops set to work to hack the thing to pieces—Madonna, angels and all. At the Restoration, the central statue was replaced; but the two angels are still headless. In fact, the entire porch once again barely escaped destruction, when the pure Gothic zeal of the Victorians condemned it as a pagan work. But that is to anticipate.

Within a few weeks the Parliament troops were drawn away, when in October 1642 the King fought the indecisive battle of Edgehill some twenty-five miles away to the north. Thereafter, he easily made his way to Oxford, with Rupert and Maurice and his own two sons. He rode in at the north gate,¹ received the Mayor and townsmen at "Penniless Bench," and established himself at Christ Church. He found himself "at good ease," the place being "entirely at his devotion," thanks to the strong loyalty of the university to the Church establishment. The citizens were less keen in their welcome; they feared that the fortification of their town might invite the visitation of his enemies upon them. But this was not yet. For the present, the King settled quietly down to spend the winter of 1642-3 in the pleasant hospitality of Christ Church.

For the next three and a half years Oxford was virtually Charles's capital. For each year's campaign, he sallied out; but here he always returned. Here he assembled the loyal remnants of his Parliament, in Christ Church Hall. In New Inn Hall he set up his mint, to which all the colleges made presents of their valuable plate. New College cloisters housed his ammunition, and the Belfry Tower was his powder-mill. All the money in the university's chests was put at his disposal. Yet one thing he was refused. It is recorded that on December 30th, 1645, the King sent to the Bodleian to borrow a book; but Bodley's statutes were meticulous and imperative. The librarian excused himself; no books could go out; the King, whom half his people suspected of a design to subvert the whole body of their laws, gave way.

¹ "They came in their full march into the town, with about 60 or 70 colours borne before them which they had taken at the said battle. . . . The ordnance and great guns were driven into Magdalen College grove, about 20 or 27 pieces, with all their carriages. . . . The scholars were put out of their colleges: and those that remained bore arms for the king in the garrison."

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In July 1648, Queen Mary joined the King at Oxford, and established herself in the Queen's rooms at Merton for nearly three years, using a private way of access through Corpus to the House. Merton gardens were a favourite place of resort for the members of the court. This was on the safe side of the town, for the Thames and Cherwell protected the south-east. Elsewhere some defences were erected. Trenches were dug to the north of the city. Logs were hauled across the road by Magdalen, and the tower stocked with stones. In Magdalen Grove, Prince Rupert's artillery was set up, and many of the elms were felled. A channel was cut to bring in the Cherwell to flood Christ Church Meadows. The New Parks north of the city, and sometimes New College quadrangle, witnessed the attempts at drill of both graduates and undergraduates. It is needless to say that what with the depravity of Court manners and these attempts to assume a "posture of defence," the studies of the university languished.¹

In April 1648, Charles left Oxford for good, escaping over Magdalen Bridge in the disguise of a servant. He had eight more days of liberty; but, just before his final capture, General Fairfax appeared outside Oxford and proceeded to invest it. It was an inglorious siege. The King sent messages to urge surrender; and indeed there was little object left in resistance. After a bare three weeks, Rupert and Maurice marched out with the honours of war, and a new age began.

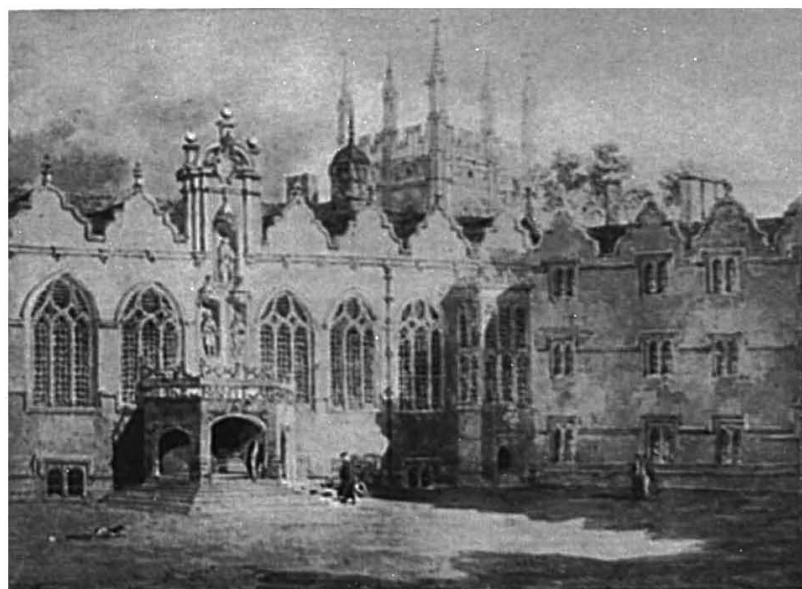
Oxford was almost emptied of its scholars by this time: "there was scarce the face of a University left, all things being out of order and disturbed." The immediate measure taken by Parliament to set things to right was to send down a cartload of Puritan preachers to preach the university out of its stalwart principles. One of their number was soon elevated to be Vice-Chancellor, in which office he was followed by Cromwell's own chaplain, John Owen. Cromwell himself became Chancellor of the University in 1650: he came down with Fairfax to receive an honorary degree, stopped at All Souls, dined at Magdalen, as we have seen, and made away with the organ.

Parliament attempted to bring the university to heel by suspending all elections to offices, and sending down a body of visitors to conduct an inquisition. Resistance to this proceeding was led by Dean Samuel Fell of Christ Church, who ignored a

¹ "Sir Arthur Aston was governor of Oxon at what time it was garrisoned for the king, a testy, froward, imperious, and tyrannical person, hated in Oxon and elsewhere by God and man. When curvetting on horseback before certain ladies, his horse flung him and broke his leg: so that it being cut off and he thereupon rendered useless for employment, one Colonel Legge succeeded him. Soon after the country people coming to market would be ever and anon asking the sentinel 'who was governor of Oxon?' They answered 'one Legge.' Then replied they: 'A pox upon him! Is he governor still?'"



44 Brasenose Front Quad, from a drawing by J. M. W. Turner (1805)



45 Oriel Quad, from a drawing by J. M. W. Turner (1801)



46 Convocation House



47 The Statue of Henrietta Maria at St. John's

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decree of deprivation. His wife and children, after an unsuccessful attempt by the soldiery to "weary them out with noise, rudeness, smell of tobacco, etc.," had to be forcibly removed from the Deanery upon boards, "like pies going to the oven." Many other senior members were evicted by the troops, and Puritan toadies installed in their place.

Yet the flame of learning was not altogether extinguished during the Commonwealth; and the thanks for this is mostly due to Wadham, the youngest but one of all Oxford's colleges. A certain John Wilkins, a Parliament man of the better sort, became Warden of Wadham in 1648¹; and about the same time young Christopher Wren came up as a gentleman commoner from Westminster. The latter was "a youth of prodigious inventive wit," and he soon outstripped all his instructors. As a gentleman commoner, he sat among the fellows, and soon himself became a Fellow of All Souls. Wilkins had rooms, as had most heads of colleges in those days, over the college gate; and he allowed the big room with the oriel window to become Wren's "astronomy chamber." Here forgathered Wren's admirers and would-be teachers, to admire the innumerable fruits of his ingenuity. John Wallis and Seth Ward, the Savilian professors of geometry and astronomy; Lawrence Rooke; Thomas Sprat, later Bishop of Rochester, scientist and stylist; William Petty, of universal genius, who founded a great family; Robert Boyle, "the father of modern science and uncle of the Earl of Cork"; these and others formed a vigorous intellectual circle in Oxford during the Commonwealth. John Evelyn passed through Oxford in 1654, and it was an essential part of his visit to call upon "that miracle of a youth, Mr. Christopher Wren." He "dined at that most obliging and universally curious Dr. Wilkins's at Wadham College." Dr. Wilkins's universal curiosity had led him to invent a transparent bee-hive and a talking statue. "He had, above in his lodgings and gallery, variety of shadows, dials, perspectives . . . a way-wiser, a thermometer, a monstrous magnet, conic and other sections, a balance on a demi-circle; most of them of his own, and that prodigious young scholar Mr. Christopher Wren."

When there came the warm sunshine of the Restoration, this group of faintly grotesque experimentalists was to blossom into the Royal Society; while Wren was to turn from his astronomy to the highest flights of architecture. All this we owe to Wadham, which excelled so much within fifty years of its foundation.

¹ He did not stay there long. Having obtained a dispensation to marry, contrary to the college statutes, he married Cromwell's own sister, and was rewarded with the Presidency of Trinity College, Cambridge. "From which being ejected at the Restoration, he faced about and by his smooth language, insinuating preaching, flatteries, and I know not what" procured himself the bishopric of Chester.