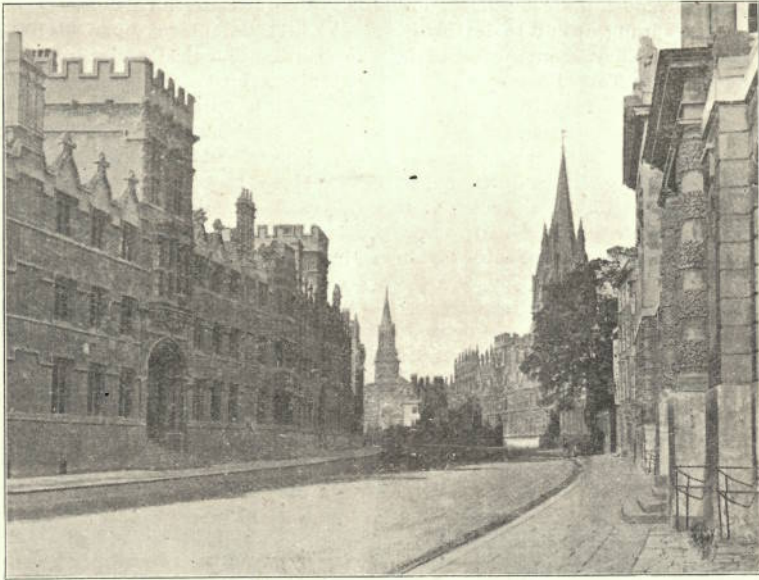


“TOWN v. GOWN”

Or, THE STORY OF OXFORD'S FAMOUS FIGHTS.

By HERBERT J. GRATTON.



“THE HIGH.”

SHOWING UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, ST. MARY'S CHURCH, AND ALL SOULS' AND QUEEN'S COLLEGES.

THE old adage—“Tall oaks from little acorns grow”—has a singularly apt illustration in the subject of this little article, and might well be bracketed underneath its title. But, lest any reader should fail to see the connection between the monarchs of the forest, and the “larks” of Oxford’s undergraduates, the truth embodied in the proverb may be well re-stated thus: “From simple causes great events arise.”

This is very true. For six hundred and fifty-eight years the “undergrads.” of Oxford have waged continuous war against the townsmen, and both sides have eagerly turned out for a pitched battle at least once in each year. For six centuries and a half every “Oxford man” has felt it his duty, nay, his doubly precious privilege, to issue from his college, accompanied by his fellows—who, for this auspicious occasion, voluntarily remove all social barriers and distinctions amongst themselves—to break as many of the townsmen’s

heads as possible, or, if the luck be against, have his own head broken by them.

This “Town v. Gown” war, which is probably the longest campaign ever known, that has its origin recorded in history, began in the year 1209. The document which mentions the event is kept in the Bodleian, at Oxford, and, being translated, reads as follows:—

“In the eleventh year of the reign of King John, a most unhappy incident fell out at Oxford. A certain clerk killed by chance a woman, which, being done, he fled away for fear of punishment. But the knowledge of the fact being soon spread abroad through the town, the Mayor and several burghers made search after him, and having at length received intelligence in what Hall or Inn he was resident, made their repair thither. And finding there three other clerks, laid hold on them, though innocent, yet cast them into prison.”

This unjust arrest of three innocent clerks, or—as we should say now-a-days—