

"Oxford is better seen than described." Most other cities are the production of policy or of commerce; their streets seem made to lead up to palace or prison gates, or out toward the masts of shipping, but Oxford, as must be felt at every turn, is a city built by the learned for lovers of learning, by scholars for the habitation of scholars.

Oxford is distant from London, in a North-westerly direction, 52 miles;—about the distance from Montreal to Acton or Lancaster. The capital of an inland county, it is free from the contagion and bustle of seaports; of an agricultural county, it has escaped the clatter and agitations of the centers of manufacturing populations. The natural situation has, in all its lineaments, something recluse and monastic. Its domes and steeples, rising through an abundance of great green trees, look out upon beautiful pastoral lowlands in the foreground, with an almost continuous surrounding upland range in the distance. Three rivers—which would never be called rivers with us, famous as they are in England, interlace the landscape, flowing hither and thither among the meadows, so that the student or the traveller from whatever quarter he sights the city, reaches it over the echoes of some resounding bridge. The sense of insulation is not now so easily awakened; but in former days, when "people used to row up to Merton College buttery to refresh themselves," the returning inmate of the schools was glad to hail a waterman to carry him over the long liquid reaches which intercepted his entrance within the walls.

The bulk of the city as is at once observed, bears a judicious proportion to the colleges. At no period has the town population very much outgrown or overbalanced the scholastic population. In our peaceful days this may be, in many respects, of less moment than formerly; but still it is worthy of remark, that at the census of 1851, the whole number of inhabitants was returned at 27,000, while 6,000 persons were on the college books, and 3,300 were actual members of Convocation. If each male adult, graduate or student, represented four of a resident family, the College men were very nearly a tie with the Townsmen.

But the relations of town and gown were not always so amicably adjusted in Oxford, as they are in our present pacific times. In the earlier modern and all through the middle ages, when for gentle and simple to carry a weapon was as common as it now is to carry an umbrella or a cane; when the artisan's dagger served to carve his meat at home, and to defend his life out of doors; when every gentleman's wardrobe included at least one sword for daily wear and one for state occasions, things went not quite so smoothly between the Isis, the Charwell, and the Thames. When the students numbered thousands of full grown men, and the professors harangued in the open air; when the Oxford burgesses mustered their forces before venturing to hold fair or festival; when a disputed succession flung its fiery arrows over the walls; when Nominalists and Realists lost their temper and forgot their logic; when there was question of the excise of bread, or of beer or of wine, or of jurisdiction of any kind, between the Chancellor and the Mayor, or with the Prior of Saint Frideswides, or the Abbott of Osney, or, indeed, in "any good cause at all," the ready weapons were soon unsheathed by both factions. For the more formidable exercise of this sort of power, the whole body of students as early as the 12th and as late as the 17th century, were divided into two "nations," each commanded by its own Proctor, or chief, elected for two years. These *nations* were known as the Northern-men and the Southern-men, or the students from the north of the Mersey and Humber, and those southward. The Welsh, and