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I Cannot Understand

O Brooklet—silver string of nature's lute,
With golden moss inlaid along thy strand,
Thou art so eloquent, but ah ! so mute,
I hear thy lay, but cannot understand.

O Tree—the zephyr's brazen harp of tears,
That sadly whisperest of trouble's hand,
My soul in dullest melancholy hears
Thy dirge, but still it cannot understand.

O Bird—celestial almoner of mirth,
Thou angel sceptered with a wizard wand,
Thou makest a paradise upon this earth
Thy paean's reach I cannot understand.

O Cloud—thou banner waving in the sky,
So proudly floating o'er th' Aeolian band ,
I seem to hear thy voices hastening by,
In anthems, but I cannot understand.

O Star—that rushest onward with the sweep
Of circles—whirling in thy orbit grand,
Methinks I hear thee whisper from thy deep
Weird secrets, but I cannot understand.

O Voices—countless in the starry choir,
Whose deep-toned music rolls o'er sea and land,
Your magic notes are winged with heavenly fire—
My spirit fails ! I cannot understand.

—Thorleif Larsen, '06.

Oxford Education

Oxford imparts her deepest and most abiding truth only to those who know her. Yet those cannot proclaim it, for the things she speaks are indeed "things unspeakable that go into the soul's soul." They cannot define the influences of beauty borne in upon them from every wall and tower and dreaming spire, in which mediaeval craftsmen expressed with finest artistic sense their yearnings for the spiritual and sublime. They cannot analyze the charm which the spirit of the past, brooding over the city, casts about them. They can only cherish Oxford's traditions and memories, surrendering their imaginations to the genius of the place. In this way they will come nearer than in any other to the heart of the English people, for the story of Oxford has been in great part the story of England.

Probably it was under Henry the Second, to whom the constitution and the national life of England owe so much, that the University first received something of definite organization at the hands of some Paris scholars. Yet long before students may have gathered in the Saxon town which had risen early near the ford of the Thames around the shrine of St. Frideswyde. Living in lodgings in the town, enduring little discipline, they thronged to lectures and disputations, or, if it pleased them, fought now among themselves, nation against nation, now against the townsmen. In their stormy existence every movement of mediaeval life and thought was reflected. In the narrow lanes of the city the black and grey friars taught and awoke the intellectual enthusiasm to which Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus and William of Ockhan gave expression. Dante himself may have come as the foremost of the foreign scholars who resorted eagerly to the northern seat of learning. The next century saw John Wyclif rouse the keenest controversy in his university and in the nation. But the new learning best revealed the intellectual vigor of Oxford. Early in the cause of the movement her scholars had hastened to Italy, and later Colet, More, Grocyn and Linacre were a group worthy of the companionship of Erasmus. The conservative spirit of the great humanist must indeed have been in accord with the feeling of the university. Wolsey, the last great mediaeval Churchman, was one of her most zealous sons.

It was no longer to such a loosely organized body as the University had formerly been that these later movements made their appeal. At first teachers and pupils had been merely united in a guild by the common enjoyment of market rights and clerical immunities, and the possession of power to enrol new members and grant degrees. The interests of order and learning alike demanded a more compact organization, and the substitution of better disciplined and more permanent residential institutions for the lodgings and halls. Accordingly, about the year 1263, John of Balliol, a powerful northern baron, in atonement for the destruction of churches, established sixteen scholars in a hostel at Oxford on an allowance of eight pence a day, and Walter de Merton, in 1274, developed this principle to its logical conclusion by giving the scholars of his foundation a permanent endowment, rights of self-government and the privileges of a corporate body. The position of the college was soon made secure in the University by reason of the adequate expression it gave to the religious and educational aspirations of wealthy and ambitious prelates. New College, Magdalen and All Souls were the forerunners of Cardinal College. It was inevitable that such colleges as these, with their endowments and traditions, should supersede the older and perhaps more democratic halls, and by their ability to withstand all vicissitudes accompanying times of storm and change, should absorb the life of the University. The mediaeval master who read his lectures on the recognized subjects and was paid by those who cared to attend was disappearing by the time of the Reformation. In 1569 the government of the University was