

**THE FOUNDATION
DOCUMENTS OF MERTON
COLLEGE, OXFORD**

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The foundation documents of Merton college, Oxford by James Heywood & James Orchard Halliwell

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JAMES HEYWOOD & JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL

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COLLEGE, OXFORD**



WALTER OF MERTON.

Bishop of Rochester
LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND.

Founder of Merton College, Oxford.

A.D. 1267.

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THE
FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS

OF

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

COLLECTED

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

HOWEVER unfriendly to the interests of literature the wars of the Barons in the thirteenth century might have been, it is no less singular than certain, that when the people began at that time to throw off the trammels which had previously excluded them from participating in most of their legitimate privileges, more was accomplished for the foundation of colleges during the continuance of those civil broils, than had been attempted for several centuries preceding them.

It is well known that Simon de Monfort, the leader of the popular cause in the reign of Henry III., was a patron of literature, and was friendly with the few prelates of that day who advocated the cause of a more intellectual system of education than was then usually considered necessary*. He was an intimate friend of Bishop Grosteste, who spoke in the highest terms of the exertions of Walter de Merton, as appears from the letters of Adam de Marisco still preserved. This is one evidence, among many that might be adduced, to prove that Walter de Merton's foundation of a college at Oxford was considered in a most favourable light by the liberal party of that day, who rejoiced to see their own principles in a fair way of being carried into execution by the very people who alone had the

* See *Chron. Willelmi de Rishanger*, p. 6, and *MS. Cotton. Vitell. C. viii.* The best authority for this is that delightful old chronicler, Matthew Paris.

power to do so efficiently, but who ranked high in the opposite party.

In these early times the Universities did not possess that permanent and fixed character which they afterwards attained. Thus, in one of the earliest notices respecting the University of Oxford, we find that Allen Basset, in the year 1243, gave two hundred marks to the University, committed to the prior and convent of Bicester, for the perpetual exhibition of two scholarships for persons who should study in Oxford, *or in whatever part of England the University should be located*; and the only religious duty mentioned is, that the holders of these exhibitions should pray for the souls of the founder and his wife. It must be remarked, also, as a circumstance particularly worthy of notice, that in this case, although the benefaction was to the University, the exhibition was not invested in it, but in a monastery, as a house of establishment, to support the perpetuity.

Walter de Merton, in like manner, in 1264, established Merton College, 'for the perpetual maintenance of scholars living in the schools at Oxford, or *elsewhere, wherever the place of study might happen to be efficiently supported*;' and then afterwards, in 1274, he ordained that no unexpected translation of them to any other residence should injure their rights or possessions, so long as they adhered to the intention of their institution*.

* The 'Scholars of Merton College, Oxford,' had considerable possessions in Cambridge, including Merton Hall, so well known traditionally as Pythagoras's School, which Walter de Merton purchased of the family of Dunning. For