CHAPTER I

ORIGINS

MODERN public education has a two-fold origin which dates back to the early days of Christianity. Its various institutions, schools, colleges, universities and the framework of administration are the creation of the Christian Church. The Church's desire to master the significance of the Scriptures, and to propagate their teaching, maintained the connexion between Christian education and the system of rhetorical instruction which flourished under the pagan Roman Empire. The pagan source determined the curriculum for centuries, and still determines it in part; the Christian source affected the curriculum and determined educational administration. As a consequence, two conflicting elements existed in the curriculum which the Middle Ages bequeathed to posterity. The primary object of early mediaeval learning was a thorough understanding of the Bible, which was most accessible to Western Europe in the Latin translation of St Jerome. A sound knowledge of Latin was therefore required in the first place; in course of time, and as they became available for study, a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew was incumbent upon the biblical scholar. The desire to understand the Scriptures was the impelling force which drove the mediaeval student to the pursuit first of language and, later, of philosophy. Charlemagne (742–814) urged the priests and monks of his dominions to improve their knowledge of Latin and to acquire more accurate texts, "that they might more easily and more directly penetrate the mysteries of the divine writings." But any sufficient study of the Latin language involved an acquaintance with Latin literature, in which was enshrined the knowledge, secular as well as sacred, then extant in Western Europe. Thus the continuity of civilization was aided by Christian aspirations which compelled resort to the educational system of the Roman Empire, its paganism notwith-

standing. The overlapping, if not the assimilation, of the two types of teaching is illustrated in the persons of the Christian Fathers. St Jerome (331–420) was a pupil of Aelius Donatus, the probably pagan author of an elementary Latin grammar book, which remained the universal primer for more than a thousand years. St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was a professor of rhetoric at Milan before his baptism.

Preparatory to the Roman schools of rhetoric, where written composition and its declamation were the principal business, the schools of grammar taught language and literature, both Latin and Greek; "grammar" and "grammar school," as technical terms, meant the study, or a place for the study, of language and of literature, more especially of the Latin speech and writers, and this usage remained throughout the Middle Ages. Incidentally the rhetorical education included a mass of erudition respecting persons, places and events, historical and mythical, with uncritical accounts of natural phenomena.

The schools of rhetoric and of grammar, with their tradition of literary study, furnished the accepted mode by which a sound knowledge of Latin was to be obtained. The early Christian educators were therefore compelled, in many cases very unwillingly, to include the classical authors in their course of study. Moreover, the Latin authors (and the Greek writers whose works were accessible in Latin) were the recognized standards of knowledge, historical, legal, political, philosophic, medical, mathematical and scientific; their books contained knowledge which, apart from them, might be said not to exist. Upon these writers, as a base, was built the whole system of mediaeval hand-books and similar aids to learning.

Later Christian ages, down to the seventeenth century at least, took exception to the moral atmosphere of Latin and Greek poetry. But the Christians who had lived in the days of a dying paganism felt a far deeper dread of works which in their eyes everywhere recalled the worship, sometimes the very degrading worship, of demonic powers. Pan and Priapus were very real to a Christian of the fourth century. A kind of dualism therefore disturbed the mediaeval curriculum, and continued to do so throughout the millennium which followed the fall of the Roman Empire. The conflict became acute in the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries. The opinion on this subject which may be considered the orthodox one of his day is expressed in a letter of Gregory the Great (Pope from 590 to 604) to the Bishop of Vienne, in which he animadverts on a rumour that the bishop was teaching certain of his friends grammar, and hopes that his correspondent is misrepresented as one addicted to "the idle vanities of secular learning." "The same mouth singeth not the praises of Jove and the praises of Christ. Think how grievous and unspeakable a thing it is for a bishop to utter that which becometh not even a religious layman[1]."

But the exigencies of biblical scholarship, or at least of a thorough understanding of the Latin language, conspired with individual temperament and acquired tastes to modify the effect of so thorough-going a condemnation of secular literature. There was a moment in the twelfth century when it seemed that France would anticipate the literary revival of the fourteen and fifteen hundreds; there is plenty of evidence that the ancient classics never entirely lacked readers during the centuries which preceded the twelfth. Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury (668–690) and his colleague, Abbot Hadrian, stimulated the study of Greek; Hadrian's pupil in that language, Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, possessed an extensive acquaintance with Latin literature, classical and Christian. In the eighth century the library of York minster was very famous; Alcuin (who had been both a pupil and a master of the cathedral school there before Charlemagne summoned him in 782 to take charge of higher education at the Frankish court) names amongst its books the writings of Cicero, Virgil, Lucan, Pliny, Statius, as well as a large number of Christian Latin authors, including Lactantius, Prudentius, Sedulius and Juvencus, whose works Colet some seven centuries later commended for school use. In the ninth century, Lupus Servatus (*d.* 862), Abbot of Ferrières, was familiar with Cicero, Livy, Sallust, Caesar, Quintilian, Suetonius, Virgil, Horace, Terence, Martial; at the same period, Latin and Greek classical literature were studied at the monastery of St Gall. Correspondence respecting the traffic in books which was maintained during the tenth century by the Bavarian abbey of Tegernsee makes mention of Cicero, Juvenal, Persius and Statius. Gerbert (Pope Sylvester II,

[1] R. L. Poole, *Illustrations of the History of Mediaeval Thought*, p. 8.

999–1003) had been *scolasticus* of the Rheims cathedral school, where he employed in his lectures the works of Virgil, Statius, Terence, Juvenal, Persius, Horace, Lucan, of Cicero, Sallust, Caesar and Suetonius. His knowledge of the ancient literature was vainly alleged against his preferment to the see of Rheims. During the eleventh century, Sallust, Virgil, Horace and Statius were read in the monastery of Paderborn, under the stimulus of St Meinwerc, who became bishop of the see in 1009.

The motives for this study were, of course, various; some readers, like St Jerome and Alcuin, were conscious of a certain culpability in the pursuit of pagan letters which was contrary to their Christian profession; others forestalled the schoolmasters of the sixteenth century by mingling the Christian Fathers and poets with the reading of authors more strictly classical. Some, like Gerbert of Rheims and Bernard of Chartres, discerned the value of the older literature as an instrument of education. But the continuity of the pre-Christian rhetorical instruction during the ages which intervened between the fall of Rome and the establishment of the Mediaeval Empire and Papacy, and the success of that persistent tradition, are amply demonstrated in the history of literature. It was the fashion of the sixteenth-century scholars to decry mediaeval Latin; and the jargon invented by certain would-be stylists of the twelfth century, as well as the sort of Latin which is parodied in the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* (1515–17), is some justification of their derision. But mediaeval Latin was also the language of the hymns of the Church and of Scholasticism, the vehicle, in the latter case, of some of the acutest of thinking known to men. The great body of writing falling under these two descriptions is sufficient evidence that the literary and grammatical studies which composed the ancient rhetorical education formed no mean part in the curriculum of its Christian successor.

Apart from special institutions for the purpose and in virtue of its every-day routine, the Church was essentially a teaching body, educating its members not only by the public recital of its offices and by the symbolism of its pictures, sculpture and architecture, but even more by its contact with daily life. The parish church was the centre of all forms of communal activity, "secular" as well as "sacred"; the trade gilds were at least as much religious

as industrial associations. Social life found its highest expression in a common worship which employed a liturgy whose sources were the Hebrew scriptures or Greek derivations from them; the language of this common worship was Latin, an alien tongue in most places even within the limits of the Roman Empire. All ecclesiastical persons, therefore, had some knowledge of Latin; lay people shared this knowledge, more or less, according to individual circumstances.

From the missionary days of the Church onwards, every settlement of ecclesiastics was a centre both of teaching and of learning. This was especially true in the case of the bishops and the band of clergy immediately associated with each of them in cathedral chapters; it was also true of the monastic houses, though their instruction was perhaps more often restricted to their inmates than was customary in the cathedrals. The intellectual activity of both bodies was directed to the Latin Bible, more especially to the Psalter. Wherever the study of the Bible was seriously undertaken, instruction in "Grammar" was a necessary preliminary; and biblical study itself in due course became theology. In the literal, historical sense of the words, the cathedral school was the parent of the grammar school and of the university.

The daily services of the cathedral included the reading of "lessons" (*i.e.* readings, chiefly biblical) and the singing of psalms and hymns. The latter required a body of choristers, boys who could at least read Latin words and sing them to the appointed music. The reading of "lessons" demanded a more intelligent understanding of the Latin language; and it was out of the necessary instruction given with this purpose in view, that the distinctive work of the cathedral school grew. The choristers were under the supervision of the Precentor, but the reading of lessons belonged to the province of the Chancellor, that member of the cathedral body who had charge of the service books (for whose correct text he was responsible), who arranged for the public reading of the scriptures by the cathedral clergy in turn, and who took charge of the secular business of the foundation. The oversight, and at first the actual conduct of the scholastic work of the cathedral was a duty of the chancellor, who in this capacity was termed *scolasticus*, or, less frequently, *archiscola*. As that work developed, a separate school, the Song School, was

established to provide the elementary instruction required by the choristers, namely Latin reading (not "grammar") and singing.

In common with all its activities, the scholastic work of the cathedral was subject to the authority of the bishop, whose delegate the scolasticus was. In course of time, the actual instruction in grammar was committed to a schoolmaster ("magister scolarum," "magister informator scolarum," the plural *scolae* meaning "school") who might, or might not, be priest or monk. Abbot Samson of Bury (1135–1211) and Alexander Neckham (1157–1217) both taught in monastic schools before they "entered religion." When the school system had become fully defined, the grammar master was frequently a layman; he was, of course, a clerk, but not "a clerk in holy orders[1]." The scolasticus, or the bishop whom he represented, remained the titular head of all school teaching given in the diocese. To prevent overlapping, and to guard the privilege of the cathedral schoolmaster, the scolasticus kept in his own hands the licensing of all schoolmasters, a proceeding entirely in accord with mediaeval ideas of social order. The litigation arising out of the infringement of these licences, as recorded from the twelfth century onwards, forms an important part of the evidence relating to the history of schools. The authority of the scolasticus was once universal throughout Christendom; it may be traced in Great Britain down to the nineteenth century and indeed still has its survivals.

An antiquity as high as the sixth century is claimed for the cathedral schools as seats of theological and kindred learning, and an even earlier origin may be ascribed to the monastic schools. Alcuin (735–804) testifies that at the Cathedral Church of York during the eighth century instruction was given in "grammar," rhetoric, astronomy, music, arithmetic, law, natural philosophy, natural history and divinity. Evidence becomes explicit in the

[1] "*Clerks* are all those who are ordained to grades in the ministry of the Church. The sacrament of orders is conferred upon him who is chosen to fill an ecclesiastical office. The major, or holy, orders are the sub-diaconate, the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate; the minor orders, which are not holy orders, are those of the singer, reader, psalmist, exorcist, door-keeper and acolyte." *Ducange.* In modern phrase "the clergy" are those only on whom major orders have been conferred. "Clerk" was also used familiarly as equivalent to scholar.

eleventh century, and in the twelfth century the cathedral school, as well as its congener, the school invariably conducted by a collegiate church, is a fully established institution. Thomas, Archbishop of York from 1070 to 1100, entered on his province when it had been devastated by the fury of William I; he restored his cathedral buildings and re-united the scattered chapter by the appointment of dean, treasurer and precentor. The record adds, very significantly, "he had already previously instituted the schoolmaster[1]." The third Lateran Council held under the presidency of Pope Alexander III in 1179 decided that in every cathedral church a competent allowance should be assigned to a master, who should teach the clerks of the foundation and poor scholars gratis, that no one was to exact a fee for granting a licence to teach, and that no capable teacher was to be prevented from teaching when he requested a licence[2].

This twelfth-century decree marks the close of a long course of growth, while the repeated injunctions of Councils to the bishops, that they should provide instruction in "grammar" as part of the spiritual provision of their dioceses, suggests a not infrequent neglect during the centuries preceding the twelfth. Incidentally, the Lateran decree mentioned above points to an active demand for schools at this period which the established organization failed to meet sufficiently. Forty years earlier, a Westminster synod (1138) had denounced the practice of sub-letting the office of schoolmaster for gain[3].

The cathedral organization, with its provision for stately worship and for the instruction of those who led it, was repeated in the collegiate church, a church served by a corporate body or "college" of clergy, who might be "regulars," that is, men living under vows to observe a "rule," but who were often in earlier days "seculars" having no such obligation. The collegiate church usually governed an adjacent almshouse, infirmary or school, or all of these, as integral parts of itself. Sometimes, where there was no local cathedral, the scolasticus of the collegiate church was made the educational licensing authority for the neighbourhood. As time went on, the educational function of the collegiate churches grew more considerable, and in the century

[1] A. F. Leach, *Educational Charters*, p. 70.
[2] *ibid.*, p. 122. [3] *ibid.*, p. 96.

before the Reformation it was a leading feature of these foundations.

The share of the monastic schools in the education of the later Middle Ages is disputed; it is both affirmed and denied that they taught others than their own novices, and that the instruction of these novices was restricted to the Psalter and the Rule, that is, the constitution and mode of life of their Order. But there is no question as to the participation of some monasteries in learning and advanced instruction during the earlier centuries. Names in illustration readily occur. Western monasticism dates from the fourth century, and the union between study and the monastic life may certainly be carried back to the Calabrian, Cassiodorus[1], who established a cloister at his birthplace, Squillace, in the year 540. The high repute as centres of learning enjoyed by the Benedictine order and by the monasteries of Irish origin at Luxeuil in Burgundy, Bobbio in Lombardy and St Gall in Alemannia dates from times subsequent to their foundation. But their early history is inseparably associated with men of the sixth century who, like Cassiodorus, were familiar with the Latin classics—St Benedict himself and the Irish monks, St Columban and St Gall. The monastery founded by the latter, and named after him, was a very celebrated seat of learning during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Before the Scandinavian raids brought fire and sword upon so many of them, the English monasteries were especially active in the work of education. As early as the year 631 the method of teaching followed by the Canterbury monks became a model for other parts of England, and the same century saw, at Wearmouth and Jarrow, the scholarly work of Benedict Biscop (*d.* 690) and his pupil, Bede (673–735). St Boniface, or Winfrith (680–755), "the apostle of Germany," and Rabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mainz (*d.* 856), the pupil of Alcuin and "Preceptor Germaniae," are instances of the learned monk and monuments of Germany's debt in religion and education to the British Isles. The nuns of Barking in St Boniface's time included a number of well-educated women, with whom the missionary saint maintained a correspondence which is still extant.

Charlemagne's first Aachen capitulary of the year 789, a set

[1] See p. 18 below.

of instructions to the commissioners who were about to inspect various parts of his empire, contains the following rescript "concerning school and the ministers of God's altar."

> Let them admit to their company and associate with themselves not only children of servile condition but sons of men of birth also. Let there be reading schools for children. In every monastery or bishop's seat let them learn psalms, notes, singing, the computus[1], grammar. But let them have catholic books well amended; because often when they desire duly to ask something of God, they ask amiss on account of uncorrected books. And do not suffer your children to spoil them when reading or writing. If it should be needful to write a gospel, psalter or missal, let persons of full age write with all diligence[2].

These words are applicable both to the education of those who were and those who were not intended to become monks, though the reference to the Computus points rather to the former class of learners. An Aachen capitulary of the year 818 forbade the admission of any but *oblati* (that is, boys devoted by their parents to the monastic life), the obvious implication being that at that date other boys sought and found entrance to the monastery schools. The prohibition may mean, as some contend, that the *externi*, the non-monkish pupils, should not be allowed to join the school in the cloister, but should be taught, as at times they were taught, in a school outside the monastery walls. However that may be, men who were not originally intended for monks learned their earliest lessons in monastery schools. St Dunstan (924–988) received his schooling from Irish monks at Glastonbury, whence he passed to the court of Athelstan, and only on his expulsion thence became a monk. Alexander Neckham, one of the leading scholars of his age, was a pupil in the claustral school of the Benedictine abbey of St Albans. Before becoming, about the age of thirty, an Austin canon at Cirencester, Neckham taught in the Benedictine school at Dunstable, and then studied and taught for seven years at the University of Paris.

The exclusion of outsiders from the monasteries, particularly of girls from women's convents, was repeatedly ordered by authority, the reason of course being that their presence disturbed the life of contemplation dissociated from the outer world, which

[1] See p. 12 below.

[2] Baluzius, *Capitularia regum Francorum*. Paris, 1677. Vol. I. col. 237, cap. 70.

was the monastic ideal. That it was necessary to repeat this prohibition somewhat frequently proves at once that schools for outsiders were not part of that ideal, and that outsiders were somewhat frequently so taught. Schools for boarders could be made a source of income, and this fact further explains the action of those authorities who took the strict view of the monastic rule.

The truth seems to be that at different times and in different places, the *externi* were refused or received, taught with the *oblati* in the cloister, or apart from them outside the monastery, according to the usage then and there prevailing. But the activity of monasteries as schools and places of learning slackened, if it did not cease, after the institution of universities in the twelfth century. In the fourteenth century, English founders of educational institutions abandoned the monastic conception in favour of an organization based on the pattern of the collegiate church. William of Wykeham's foundations, New College, Oxford (1379) and "Saint Mary College of Winchester" (1382), the senior Public School, are examples.

The prominent position in public worship which was assigned to the Psalter led to a noticeable development in the cathedral and monastic schools. The proper province of these was "Grammar," and the Latin language occupied virtually all the hours which these schools devoted to teaching. But the chanting of the psalms in accordance with the Roman or Gregorian mode was esteemed in the West as a mark of orthodoxy and of communion with Rome, long after the seventh-century controversies had died away. Boy choristers, trained to the Roman chant and able to read (not necessarily to understand) Latin, were needed in every great church. These boys did not learn Grammar, nor were they taught in the Grammar School; those who were employed by cathedral or collegiate chapters were taught in "Song Schools"; the choir-boys of a monastery, not being *oblati*, were taught in "almonries" or charity schools, usually outside the monastery walls, but near enough to the buildings to allow the boys to act as servants to the monks.

The song schools and almonries, in as much as they taught their pupils to read, may be regarded as elementary schools; but the teaching did not concern itself with the mother-tongue and its main object was liturgical and religious. This may be regarded