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James Bass Mullinger

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION.

THE thirteenth century embraces within its limits an eminently eventful era in European history. It was an age of turbulence and confusion, of revolution and contention, wherein, amid the strife of elements, it is often difficult to discern the tendencies for good that were undoubtedly at work, and where the observer is apt to lose sight of the real onward progress of the current as he marks the agitations which trouble the surface of the waters. But that a great advance was then achieved it is impossible to deny. The social, the religious, and the intellectual life of Europe were roused by a common impulse from comparative stagnation. The Church, threatened by its own degeneracy, took to itself other and more potent weapons; scholasticism, enriched by the influx of new learning, entered on its most brilliant phase; oriental influences, the reflex action of the Crusades, stirred men to fresh paths of thought; and England, no longer regarded as a subjugated nation, grew rapidly in strength and freedom. To this century the University of Cambridge traces back its first recorded recognition as a legally constituted body, and refers the foundation of its most ancient college, and, in the absence of authentic records concerning her early history, it becomes especially desirable to arrive at a clear conception of the circumstances that belong to so important a commencement. It will accordingly be desirable, in this introductory chapter, to pass under review the leading features of education and learning in those ages which

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preceded the university era; to trace out, as far as may be conducive to our main purpose, the habits of thought and traditional belief that necessarily found expression in the first organisation and discipline of the universities themselves; to estimate the character and direction of those innovations which the universities inaugurated; and in order to do this, however imperfectly, we shall find it necessary to go back to that yet earlier time which links the civilization of Paganism with that of Christianity.

The Imperial
Schools of
the Roman
Empire.

The university age commences in the twelfth century; and it is a fact familiar to every student, that nearly all learning had up to that period been the exclusive possession of the Church. In the third and fourth centuries indeed the traditions of Roman culture were still preserved in full vigour in Transalpine Gaul; Autun, Trèves, Lyons, and Bordeaux were distinguished as schools of rhetoric and their teaching was ennobled by many an illustrious name; but with the invasion of the Franks the imperial schools were swept away, and education when it reappeared had formed those associations which, amid so many important revolutions in thought and the decay of so many ancient institutions, have retained their hold with such remarkable tenacity and power up to our own day. The four centuries that preceded the reign of Philip Augustus have been termed, not inaptly, 'the Benedictine era'.¹ In the monasteries of that great order, which rose in the sixth century, was preserved nearly all that survived of ancient thought, and was imparted whatever still deserved the name of education. It is important to remember to how great an extent the monasticism of the West was the result of the troubles and calamities that ushered in the fall of the western empire. The fierce asceticism of the anchorites of the East found no place in the earlier institutions associated with the names of the most illustrious of the Latin Fathers. The members of those humble communities which were found in Rome, Milan, and Carthage, were men seeking refuge from the corruption,

Commence-
ment of the
Benedictine
Era.

¹ Léon Maitre, *Les Ecoles Episcopales et Monastiques de l'Occident*, p.174.

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anarchy, and misery of their age, ready to bid adieu to the world and its cares, so that they might pass the remainder of their days in holy duties and tranquil occupations, in fasting, meditation, and prayer. In precisely the same spirit St Benedict reared on Monte Cassino the first monastery of his order, and drew up those rules for its observance whereby self-mortification, isolation from mankind, the exclusion of all social and patriotic virtues in the cultivation of a lonely perfection, were indicated as the chief principles of the religious life.

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conception of
the religious
life.Foundation
of the
Monastery of
Monte
Cassino,
A.D. 531.

Inasmuch, accordingly, as the monk renounced the world, his education was conceived solely with reference to those acquirements necessary to the performance of his monotonous routine of duties. The Benedictine's knowledge of music was given him only that he might chant the Gregorian antiphony; of arithmetic and astronomy, that he might rightly calculate the return of Easter; of Latin, that he might understand the Fathers and the Vulgate; and these acquirements, together with a slender knowledge of geometry and versification, made up, for centuries, the ordinary culture of his order. That the education of those times was that of the monk, and consequently breathed only of the monastery, has indeed been the superficial criticism with which the subject has often been contemptuously dismissed, but a somewhat closer investigation would seem to reveal to us another element in the motives and sentiments then prevalent, which should not in justice be left unrecognized.

Influence of
the monastic
view upon
education.

The teaching of the Latin Church at the time when, under Gregory the Great, she laid the foundations of her temporal power, rested on the authority of three Fathers,—Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine¹. From the first she derived her conception of sacerdotal authority; from the second, her attachment to monasticism; from the third, her dogmatic theology; and to these three conceptions the most remarkable phenomena in European history may undoubtedly be referred. In the writings of Augustine, especially,—‘the

St Augustine.
b. 354.
d. 430.Theory de-
veloped by
this Father.¹ Milman, *Hist. of Latin Christianity*, Book II c. 4.

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oracle of thirteen centuries,'—is to be found the key to the belief and practice of the Church in the Middle Ages.

His *De Civi-
tate Dei*.

The different treatises by the bishop of Hippo that have descended to us are voluminous, but his philosophy of history is set forth in a work of comparatively moderate compass,—the *De Civitate Dei*. From the earliest times, a very solemn belief had prevailed with more or less intensity in the different sections of the Church that the day of judgement and the end of the world were at hand. As the troubles of the empire multiplied, this conviction grew and deepened alike in the eastern and western communities. It was held by Clemens and Tertullian, by Origen and Cyprian, by Athanasius and Lactantius, by Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Jerome, but it devolved on Augustine to develop it in its full significance and logical connexion with human history. The age in which this father lived was that wherein the fabric of the empire, already undermined and shaken, began actually to go to pieces. During his lifetime he saw the Eternal City become the abode of the Goth; he died while the Vandal was laying siege to the city of his own episcopate. Paganism, in its terror and despair at the fast thickening calamities, affirmed that the ancient gods, incensed at the neglect of their worship, had thus manifested their displeasure; Christianity, it was declared, was responsible for the sack of Rome and the defeat of the imperial armies. In reply to such accusations, Augustine put forth the *De Civitate Dei*. An exposition of the theory so elaborately unfolded in the twenty-four books of this work would be here misplaced, but the leading sentiment may be stated in a few words.

The age of
St Augustine.Anticipations
of the fall of
the Roman
Empire.

Rome had indeed fallen, replied the Christian Father, nor could it well be otherwise; for she represented an order of things fated to be overthrown; the earthly city, with its superstitions and its crimes, its glory and renown, was destined to give place to another city, the city of the New Jerusalem. A sublime theocracy was to supersede the rule of the Cæsars. No vision of temporal power, like that which invested the seven hills, rose before his eyes; the city he beheld was that which he of the Apocalypse saw descending

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from heaven, whither should be brought the 'glory and the honour of the nations.' Time itself should cease to be when the true Eternal City had appeared.

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In brief the advent of the new reign necessarily implied the termination of the old, and the calamities of the age were but the funeral knell of the Roman empire. But what imported the downfall of an empire, when all earthly things were destined so soon to pass away? A question of far deeper moment, of a far closer personal interest, pressed on men for a solution. 'Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat¹?' The language of St Peter was but echoed by Augustine with a greater particularity of time and place.

The applica-
tion.

It is easy to perceive that events after Augustine's time would certainly not tend to dispel the belief to which he thus gave expression; that as the Visigoth in Spain, the Frank in Gaul, the Lombard in Italy, trampled on the remnants of ancient civilization,—that as Christianity itself expired in Africa, under the advance of the victorious Crescent,—while the sword and famine reduced once fertile and populous regions to desolate wastes,—men's hearts might well begin to fail them at the contemplation of so hopeless a future. We can well understand that the ordinary aims and pursuits of life appeared frivolous and unmeaning, as the expected crisis seemed yearly to draw nearer, heralded by each successive disaster; and that the religious or monastic life might thus come to be regarded as the only adequate expression of one profound conviction, the conviction,—to use the forcible language of Guizot,—of '*l'impossibilité de tout long travail et de tout paisible loisir.*' The monastery indeed which St Benedict founded on Monte Cassino, and which the Lombard soon after levelled to the ground, affords alike in its conception, its institution, and its fall, an illustration of the

Seeming cor-
roboration of
the theory
afforded by
subsequent
events.Despair the
prevailing
feeling.¹ 2 Peter iii 18.

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characteristics of those times. In its conception,—as an effort to escape from the disquiet of the age, and a renunciation of all hope and interest in the pursuits of mankind; in its institution,—supplanting as it did a temple of Apollo where the pagan peasant still brought his offerings and paid his vows, but where the monk now cut down the once sacred grove, and broke in pieces the idol; in its fall,—as participating in the general devastation that marked the progress of the barbarian, hostile alike to the ancient civilization and the new faith.

Gregory the
Great.
b. 543.
d. 604.

View held by
this father.

The terror and despair which the Lombard spread through Italy imparted new force to the prevalent conviction, and the policy of Gregory the Great affords a remarkable illustration both of the hold which these forebodings had gained on the foremost minds of the period, and their collateral effects on learning and education. The activity and energy displayed by this ecclesiastic in consolidating the institutions and extending the authority of his see, might appear at variance with such a theory, were we not also to remember that his efforts were undoubtedly conceived in subordination to exclusively religious feelings. It was thus that while he laboured to raise his country from physical and moral degradation, to husband and augment the patrimony of the Church, to convert the heathen, to bring about a unity of faith and of forms of worship, he is still to be found anticipating, with an earnestness beyond suspicion, the approach of the final consummation. ‘What,’ he says, at the close of a long enumeration of the calamities that had befallen Italy, ‘what may be taking place elsewhere I know not, but in this country, wherein we dwell, events plainly no longer foretell the end but exhibit it in actual process;’ in a letter to the converted Ethelbert, the Bretwalda, he again declares that signs, such as those amid which St Benedict had foretold that Rome should be overthrown, fearful portents in the heavens and tumults in the air, war, famine, pestilence, and earthquake, all point to the same conclusion¹; elsewhere he

¹ ‘Appropinquante autem eodem ante non fuerunt, videlicet immutationes aeris, terroresque de cælo, et mundi termino, multa imminent quæ

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relates how the spirit of Eutychius the martyr appeared in a vision to the bishop of Ferentina, urging him to watchfulness with the thrice reiterated warning, '*Finis venit universæ carnis*;' in another passage he compares the age to the early dawn, with the light of eternity already traversing the gloom and darkness of time¹.

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That, with such convictions, he should have set small value on merely secular learning becomes sufficiently intelligible, and it might have served, perhaps, in many instances, to diminish the asperity with which his memory has been treated, had this feature been more frequently borne in mind. Puritanism, in later times, has reproduced his illiberality with far less to plead in justification. Whether we owe to him the loss of the Palatine library or that of the missing decades of Livy, we need not here stop to enquire, but it is certain that his hostility to pagan learning is but imperfectly explained if attributed solely to the prejudices of a bigoted and unlettered spirit. It took its rise rather in what appeared to him the utter irrelevancy of such studies to the religious life, as that life was conceived under the influence of one overwhelming idea. He inherited in all its force the theory of Augustine, but he lacked the sympathetic genius and the culture of the African Father. In education, that alone appeared to him of any value, which was recommended by its presumed utility in promoting a more intelligent comprehension of Christian doctrine or imparting greater ability to conduct the services of the Church. Whatever appeared likely to subserve such purposes at once gained his warmest advocacy. Thus, accordingly, while he is to be found on one occasion austere condemning certain monks who had ventured to instruct their pupils in profane literature², he was yet the great promoter of education in his

Considerations that may serve to modify our estimate of his character.

contra ordinem temporum tempestates, bella, fames, pestilentia, terræ motus per loca.' *Epist.* xi 67. For the prophecy of St Benedict recorded by Gregory, see *Dialog.* ii 15.

¹ *Dialogues*, iv 41.

² 'Quod sine verecundia memorare non possumus, fraternitatem tuam

grammaticam quibusdam exponere.' *Epist.* xi 54. 'Grammatica' among the Romans in the time of the Empire meant the elements of literature generally; it also included Philology. 'Ez grammaticæ, quam in Latinum transferentes *litteraturam* vocaverunt, fines suos norit.' Quintil. vi 1 4.

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time¹; and, while he so largely encouraged the monastic spirit, his administration of the temporalities of his see was eminently sagacious and successful.

The light of faith was rekindled in Britain by the teaching of Augustine and his missionaries; and within little more than half a century after the death of Gregory, Theodorus, an Asiatic Greek, was appointed to the see of Canterbury. The impulse given by this ecclesiastic to education long continued to influence the course of instruction, and in the curriculum he introduced may be discerned the rude outlines of our modern system². His work was ably continued by Aldhelm, second abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Malmesbury, and afterwards also archbishop of Canterbury. The talents and intense application of this prelate enabled him to acquire a mastery of the Latin and Greek tongues, and his biographer, the monk Faricius, even

Theodorus.
b. 602.
d. 690.

See also Suetonius *de Grammaticis*, c. 4, and remarks of Gräfenhan in his *Geschichte der Klassischen Philologie im Alterthum*, iv 52, 53. In the Chapter entitled *Ueberblick des grammatischen Studiums* (iv. 95—113) this writer has elaborately illustrated the extended functions of the *Grammatici* in the third and fourth centuries. It is evident that they really included those of the *Rhetores*. Ozanam remarks that, in Gaul, 'grammar extended into the domain of rhetoric, comprising the humanities, and a critical reading of all the great orators and poets of antiquity.' *History of Civilization in the Fifth Century*, i 204. The term continued to bear this meaning throughout the Middle Ages. Cf. Du Cange, s. v., and Dr Maitland's remarks in *The Dark Ages*, p. 179.

¹ Prof. Maurice adduces in proof of this the improvement in Britain consequent upon the arrival of Gregory's missionaries:—'Schools seem to rise as by enchantment; all classes, down to the poorest (Bede himself is the obvious example), are admitted to them; the studies beginning from theology embrace logic, rhetoric, music, and astronomy.' *Philosophy of the First Six Centuries*, p. 153. The

whole criticism of Gregory in this treatise will be found eminently suggestive: it may, however, be questioned whether, as Bede was born seventy-six years after the landing of Augustine and his fellow-labourers, the learning of our earliest encyclopædist is not rather attributable to the influence of Theodore.

² For an interesting account of the instruction given in these schools, see Dean Hook's *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, i 240—244. 'When books were scarce, oral instruction, or instruction through the medium of lectures, was a necessity..... The proficiency of the scholars was tested, not only by an occasional examination, but by a constant course of questioning and cross-questioning, as connected with each lesson. The instruction was catechetical. Of the mode of conducting these examinations some examples exist, and the questions put to the pupils of the arithmetic class are very similar to those with which the masters and scholars of National Schools are familiar as emanating from Her Majesty's inspectors.' Respecting the library which Theodorus is reported to have brought with him, see Edwards' *Memoirs of Libraries*, i 101.

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accredits him with some knowledge of Hebrew¹. Aldhelm died in 709, and was succeeded by Bede the Venerable, whose writings form an important contribution to the textbooks of the subsequent age. In the eighth century the school of York rose into celebrity, distinguished by its valuable library and the eminence of its scholars; of these, Alcuin, for some time the guardian of its literary treasures, must undoubtedly be regarded as the most accomplished scholar of his day. The culture to which our country attained at this period cannot however be shown to have had much connexion with subsequent developments. The comparative immunity she then enjoyed from troubles like those that agitated the Continent favoured her advance in education and learning, but with the Danish invasions the fair promise disappeared. The land relapsed into semi-barbarism; and the ninth and tenth centuries, rising like a wall of granite, between the times of Alcuin and those of Lanfranc, seem effectually to isolate the earlier age. To trace the progress of European thought we shall consequently find it necessary to follow Alcuin across the English channel to the court of Charlemagne.

INTRO-
DUCTION.Aldhelm.
b. —
d. 709.
Bede.
b. 672.
d. 735.Alcuin.
b. 735. (?)
d. 804.Charle-
magne.
b. 742.
d. 814.

It is a trite observation, that a state of warfare, like many other evils, is far from being an unmixed ill, in that it calls into action virtues which are wont to slumber in times of prosperity and peace; and similarly we may note that, in seasons of great national suffering and trial, ideas often reappear which seem to have well nigh passed from the memory of man amid the pursuits of a more tranquil age. Monasticism, in the sixth century, was dignified by a conviction in comparison with which the ordinary hopes and fears of men might well appear contemptible; if representing despondency in relation to things temporal, it had its heroism not less than its despair; but when we recall to how great an extent the theory enunciated by Augustine

Change in
the aspect of
affairs in
Europe.

¹ 'Miro denique modogratia[?]Graia[?] facundia omnia idiomata sciebat, et quasi Graecus natione: scriptis et verbis pronuntiabat Prophetarum exempla, Davidis Psalmos, Salamonis

tria volumina, Hebraicis literis bene novit, et legem Mosaicam.' *Aldhelmi Vita*, Faricio Auct., published by the Caxton Society.

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RISE OF THE CARLOVINGIAN EMPIRE.

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of Charle-
magne.Theory
respecting
the appear-
ance of Anti-
christ.Connexion
between this
theory and
political
events.

and enforced by Gregory derived its strength from the apparent corroboration afforded by contemporary calamities, we naturally turn to enquire, with some curiosity, how far such anticipations were found to consist with the spectacle that now greeted Europe,—the formation of a new and splendid empire. It must then be admitted that this theory appears well nigh lost to view amid the promise of the reign of Charlemagne, but it should be remembered that a specific as well as a general explanation of the fact offers itself for our consideration. It was the belief of the Church that the advent of Antichrist would precede the final dissolution of all things, and we accordingly find that, inasmuch as the fall of the Roman empire had been supposed to be necessarily involved in his triumph and reign, it was customary among the earlier Christians to pray for the preservation and stability of the imperial power, as interposing a barrier between their own times and those of yet darker calamity. It was not until Rome had been taken by Alaric that Augustine composed the *De Civitate Dei*. But now, with the lapse of the two centuries that separated the age of Gregory from that of Charlemagne, a change had come over the aspect of human affairs. The empire of the Franks had, by successive conquests, been extended over the greater part of Europe; the Lombards, the great foes of all culture, acknowledged the superiority of a stronger arm; the descendants of the Huns, thinned by a series of sanguinary conflicts, accepted Christianity at the point of the sword; the long struggle between the emperor and the Saxons of the north had represented, from the first, an antagonism between the traditions of civilization and those of barbarism and idolatry; while in the devotion of Charlemagne to the Church, a sentiment already so conspicuous in his father, it became evident that the preponderance of strength was again ranged on the side of the new faith. The advent of Antichrist was therefore not yet; and with that belief the still more dread anticipation which had so long filled the minds of men ceased to assert itself with the same intensity, and in the conception of Charlemagne, to which our attention must now be directed,