

Feudalism had in it much of isolation. Each fief, barony, and kingdom was something apart by itself. The universities counteracted this isolation, for even the smallest of them were European rather than local. The cosmopolitan character of the student-body and the community of scholastic pursuits created an intellectual kinship which made brothers of all nationalities, so that a Frenchman was as much at home in Oxford as he was in the Latin Quarter of Paris. To the universities, therefore, next to the crusades, must be credited the Europeanizing of Europe.

Then, again, the universities were the democratizing and leveling agents of that time,—the greatest democratizing agents that had thus far appeared. Every one of them was a free commonwealth; the only pass-port required for admission, was the ability and desire to learn. They allowed no distinction of class; prince and peasant were on exactly the same footing. The only aristocracy recognized within their walls was the aristocracy of brains.

In the universities of those days, there were not, of course, so many faculties as we find in our institutions to-day. As a rule, each school devoted itself to some one department of knowledge—liberal arts, medicine, law or theology. The system of teaching was simple, almost exclusively oral. But what more effective teacher is there than the living voice? There was no attempt made at giving the student the whole sum of knowledge before he left the college walls. They aimed at a severe training of the intellectual powers. They realized, what modern makers of educational systems sometimes forget, that if the student has the root of knowledge, the branches and fruit will come of experience.

Primary schools were no novelty in the Thirteenth Century. They had already been in existence for many years. And in spite of the calumnious statements of the enemies of Rome, the church urged, even from the pulpit, the attendance of children at these schools. In the city of Florence in the Thirteenth Century, we find that out of a population of 90,000, twelve thousand were attending the schools. And yet those times have been called ages of ignorance and mental bondage!

Of course, there was a pretty wide prevalence of illiteracy in the Thirteenth Century, but not nearly so great as it was in subsequent centuries down to the Nineteenth. But then, illiteracy is not necessarily ignorance. Illiteracy, moreover, is not quite as extinct as the Dodo. We have a form of illiteracy to-day that is far more reprehensible than that of the olden time. It is "educated illiteracy" —

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