

LECTURE ON THE REVIVAL OF LITERATURE.

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The marvelous excitement occasioned by the crusades in the European states, had also the effect of bringing into systematic operation an institution which contributed much, though indirectly, to the revival of learning. The spirit of chivalry had its fullest exemplification during the wars of the crusaders, and affected so materially the manners and principles of society during the eleventh century, that historians have usually considered it in the light of an extensive and beneficial institution. It doubtless arose naturally out of the system adopted by the various states that arose after the fall of the Roman empire. Its origin is to be ascribed to the feudal system. In that system, the relation which subsisted between a lord and his vassal required a reciprocity of services, and afforded an occasion, whatever might be its faults in other respects, for the most magnanimous, the most enthusiastic devotedness. In the feudal mansions of a Germanic lord, we trace the commencement of knighthood in those who held offices of trust about his person. Their ability to discharge the duties of it, would be their first recommendation to the post of trust and danger. Afterwards, when the sanctions of religion acquired weight and strength, its solemnities were added to their more formal investiture. Their duties, at first a matter of necessity, became honourable. The bold, spirited and sagacious created an office for themselves. They became an order, imbued with the moral sentiments of the priest and fired with the reckless courage of the barbarian. They gave a tone to the times. They opened the halls of the great to the songs of the poet and the tales of the romancer. Their own achievements furnished the theme and story; and there was a class of men, ready to avail themselves of both, to give interest and the semblance of truth to their historic poetry. The Troubadours were an order of persons who in the middle ages subsisted by the arts of music and poetry. They were itinerant bards and musicians, were held in great respect and often arose to high distinction. It is remarkable but it is true, that if you search into the early history of any tribe of Europe or America, you will observe the existence of a class which professes, as we say in Scotland, the same qualifications. Among the Jews, of course, you are sensible of the early subsistence of an order of poetical musicians. The Book of Psalms, the

Lamentations, the Songs of Moses, David, Isaiah, and other prophets, were written in measure and sung, probably by those who composed them.—“As for the gods of the heathen they are but idols, but it is the Lord that made the heavens,” was the burden of their song. They had truth for the basis and groundwork of their poetry, but a similar mode of expression, a poetical music seems to have been universal. Musicians or bards were a race highly honoured among the Danish tribes. The bards of Gaul says Strabo, were held in singular honour. In Wales, many of them were massacred by Edward the First, because the order had great enough influence to counteract his designs upon the liberties of the people. In Ireland, on one occasion, the chiefs only of separate bands of them mustered to the number of a thousand. Well, a similar order of persons evidently the offspring of earlier days, appeared in the middle ages. They were among the chief literati of the day. They indicated the twilight of the poetry of the present time. They were the fathers of romance so fashionable in the last century and prepared the way for the novel which is so prevalent in this.

Another cause which may be considered as having exerted a favourable influence upon the revival of literature, was the general use and establishment of the Roman civil law. “The Roman law, from its peculiar beauty and elegance,” says Erskine, “has got the appellation of the civil law, although that epithet was applicable originally to the laws of all countries alike.” There is reason to believe that, prior to the fourteenth century, the Roman code was not unknown in the middle ages. As cities grew rich and populous, a way was preparing for the introduction of some system of jurisprudence. The civil law began to be diligently studied and laboriously commented upon first in Italy, which long continued the school of its most successful promulgation. Other parts of Europe caught from Italy the enthusiasm, and sent a vast number of students to Bologna and other Italian schools, to be educated in the Roman jurisprudence. In England and France, institutions were soon established for its cultivation. It became the fashionable study, and was held in such estimation as to supersede, for a time, the cultivation of all other arts and sciences. The military character proportionately sunk in public esteem. Public honours were reserved for the most successful students of the