

European Progress in the Middle Age



WE frequently hear that in the Middle Age the laity were kept in the grossest ignorance by the clergy, that even the nobility were so uncultivated that many of them were unable to sign their own names. In the early period of the Middle Age ignorance was undoubtedly the lot of the warriors, who became the progenitors of most of the European nobles, but when these men became Christians and members of civilized society they did not long remain in that ignorance.

History shows that in nearly all the monasteries there were two kinds of schools,—the internal, for those who wished to become religious, and the external, for those who showed no such inclination. While the nobles are said to have despised learning, we know that they were very zealous in founding schools and colleges. Thus in Paris, between the years 1313 and 1369, six colleges were established by noble laymen.

Even in the early Middle Age every cathedral, and nearly every monastery, had its school and library in accordance with canonical enactments. Hallam admits that the praise of having originally established schools belongs to some bishops of the sixth century; but at least so far as Ireland is concerned, it is known that her schools were celebrated throughout Europe in the fifth century.

As to higher education, not only was it not neglected, but the most celebrated universities were founded and perfected in the so-called "Dark Age." Most renowned was the Irish school of Bangor, with its thousands of students, and other Irish establishments at Lindesfarne, in England; at Bobbio, in Italy; at Verdun, in France, and at Ratisbon, Cologne, and Vienna, in Austria. The University of Padua frequently numbered eighteen thousand students. Famous, also, were the universities of Bologna, Rome, Naples and Perugia, of Paris, of Salamanca and Valladolid, of Oxford and Cambridge, of Heidelberg and Leipsic.

It is true that in this so badly understood epoch the hunting and soldiering barbarians at first disdained the peaceful triumphs