

TO EVERY AFRICAN FRESHMAN

By

Bernard Fonlon

Dip. Ed. (Oxon), M. A., Ph. D. (N. U. I.)

A Foreword

Fifteen years ago, back in 1954, I began my university studies in Ireland, in the city of Cork where

"The Bells of Shandon
Sound so grand on
The pleasant waters
Of the river Lee."¹

As I look back, now, and memory brings to light the bright faces of the friendly youths and the charming colleens among whom I found myself then, I begin to wonder whether those youngsters, in their teen-agedness, had a keen, clear, and precise awareness of what they had come there for, of the sort of mind that university studies were meant to shape in them.

As it would have been anywhere else, I met there some very highly intelligent boys and girls; but, as I see it, now, almost all of them, to a man, were bent, foremost, on getting a degree, as fast as possible, obtaining a job thereafter, somewhere, in Ireland, England, America, Canada or Australia, and making a career. But I do not think that they knew (or cared, for that matter) what was the genesis of this age-long institution on which their future so much depended, or that they had a precise concept of the real nature, end and purpose of higher studies; and, consequently, a clear idea of how they could set about to co-operate with the faculty, to exploit their chances, methodically, fully, in order to get, for themselves, the right sort of university education—something more¹ than just a skill to wield, to earn their keep in life.

1. The Bells of Shandon, by Francis O'Mahoney—nineteenth century Irish Priest-Poet; a native of the City of Cork.

When I set foot in University College Cork, I was thirty years of age, and had expended the larger share of those thirty years (in fact twenty four all told) at school, at books. Just before going to Ireland, I had spent six years in an abortive bid for the Catholic Priesthood; three of which years I had employed in an intensive course in Philosophy; the other three in Theology—courses which, rightly dispensed and tackled and assimilated, can give the mind a turn and bent and discipline which few other studies are able to instil. The professors told us that Philosophy was an ancilla (a handmaid) to Theology, and was meant to prepare us for a more thorough-going study and grasp of that subject.

But as to relevance of Philosophy to the other disciplines and to the complex problems of life, in the world, they said not a word, and, I am inclined to the mind that, highly intelligent and highly educated as they were (indeed some of them have left an indelible imprint in my mind for their learning, scholarship and humaneness), they did not see that there was a burning need to inculcate into us that there is a philosophical approach to every human question.

Thus, during a long university career, which took me from the National University of Ireland to the Sorbonne, in Paris, and to Oxford, my idea of the nature of university studies was not as clear and as precise as it ought to have been, considering my previous training and background. My predominant obsession, during those years abroad, was with the fact that, back home, Cameroonians were agitating for the reunification of the French and British sectors of the country, divided, between the Allies, since the rule of the Kaiser's Reich was ousted; and I was bent on getting, for myself, as good and as thorough a training as I could, in order to help in building the reunited country—if it came. My foremost concern and preoccupation, at that time, was, obviously, not with the psychological and historical genesis and growth of the University, nor with the intrinsic nature and end and purpose of university studies.

During the last five or six years, however, I have given deep thought to this problem; I have communed with profound authorities on the subject, such as the eminent, nineteenth-century English Churchman, the famous Cardinal Newman; I have read current literature on university problems, and on what is now going down as the University Revolution; and I have come to certain conclusions on the subject. It may be that, since my university days, things have

changed for the better and the students of today have a clearer, keener and more precise awareness of what university education is all about.

Notwithstanding, I have decided to put the fruits of my meditation and research before the African Student, at the threshold of his university career. And I do this in the hope that he will take my conclusions for what they are worth.

Yaoundé, August 6th, 1969.

The Birth and the Growth of Universities

We of the African race cannot remind ourselves too often of what the blackman has gone through and of the condition in which he finds himself today consequent on centuries of tribulation. He was despoiled of all he had, despoiled of his rights, despoiled of his mind, despoiled of the will to resist; he was degraded, reduced to the level of the beast; in the words of a celebrated Oratorium:

*"He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."*¹

Today he finds himself right at the bottom of the pit, at the lowest rung of human achievement; he is struggling to rise, in the words of the famous psalm, *de profundis*—out of the deepest depths. The whole purpose of all his striving is to wring back from a hostile and unrelenting foe that dignity of which he has been reft. To achieve this, more is required of him than from any other race: more thought, more work, more energy, more faith in himself.

In the affliction of slavery, the slave yearned and strove for freedom; under the yoke of colonial rule, the African fought for independence.

Independence seems to have been won; but, before long it is dawning upon us that what we have won is the shadow and not the reality of self-rule. For, from being the slaves of our former masters, we have only been promoted to the dubious dignity of a beggar at his gate. We depend on him too much for the barest needs of life, and beggars do not have the liberty to choose.

Indeed, when you consider the arrogance of Smith, Verwoerd and Salazar and the hesitant attitude of the « Western Democracies » in the face of the principle of equal rights for the black peoples, when you consider the part that these « Democracies » have

¹ The Messiah (Ait) XXIII: By George Frederick Kennel.

played in the spate of coups that Africa has seen in recent years and the cynical joy they derive therefrom, you awake to the fact that imperialist and reactionary forces are launching an offensive, an onslaught, against the forces of progress in Africa, for a reconquest of the continent. Make no mistake about it: the danger is real and imminent, and if progressive forces are crushed, if reaction rides in triumph, if African independence collapses, we are in for a yoke worse than any we have known.

Africa must unite, mobilize, to stem the tide of resurgent imperialism and to consolidate our political independence. This can only be done by loosening the foreign strangle-hold on our economies; we must develop and exploit our resources rationally.

But what can we do to achieve this? To achieve this we need two basic, fundamental, absolutely indispensable means, namely, Knowledge and Capital.

Of these, knowledge is of greater importance in the order of things; for we all know that what has given the whiteman his overwhelming superiority in the world is science, and one of the greatest handicaps that barred the African's road to progress was ignorance.

Even in the political domain knowledge is of supreme importance; for, as Aristotle has stressed, good government is not the work of chance but of science and purpose.

It can be asserted, therefore, absolutely, that it is principally through knowledge, coupled with skill, that the blackman is going to win that dignity which is the end of all his striving. Yes, it has been rightly said that Knowledge is Power.

Up to this, in our plans for natural development, great emphasis has been laid on the political and the economic; and rightly so. But it needs to be stressed, and stressed again and again, that after the setting up of our political institutions, the next thing that should absorb our attention (at the same time as our economic development) is the creation and the consolidation of our institutions of higher learning.

In this essay, I intend to speak about the most important of these—the University—with reference to African needs and aspirations; and before I speak of it, from this point of view, I would like to say something about what the University is, in itself.

The Root of the Word

The word University comes from two Latin words *uni* (dative of *unus*, meaning **one**) and *versus*, meaning in the direction of, toward, into: **uni-versus**, towards one, into one. It connotes a movement, a combination of many things into one; and when that happens, when many combine into one, the outcome is a whole. As an adjective, the word **universus** was used to qualify anything which resulted from the putting together of many parts into one. This was commonest in the expression **universus mundus**, meaning the whole world. As time went on, the expression **universus mundus** was replaced in general usage by the neuter of the adjective—**universum**, the universe, that is, all things that exist considered as forming one, the whole creation.

The Latin suffix *itas* (genitive—*itatis*) signifies a state of being; **unitas**, the state of being one or united, unity. **Universitas**, therefore, originally meant the **state** of things united to form a whole. Later on, especially in the middle ages, the meaning was extended to include the **whole** itself considered as made of parts; and further still to any **group or body of persons, a corporation**. And thus it came about that, by the end of the twelfth century, any gathering of masters and students in the prominent cities of Europe like Paris, Rome, Oxford, formerly known as a **Studium Generale**, a school of universal learning, a place of learning for all, became increasingly known as **Universitas magistrorum et scholarium**, a gathering, a guild, a community, of masters and scholars. Finally, the rest of the phrase was dropped and the **Studium Generale** or the **Universitas magistrorum et scholarium**, became known, from thenceforth, simply as a **Universitas—a University**.

Historically, therefore, a University meant, the gathering or the assemblage of masters and students from all parts of the known world into one spot, into one city, for the purpose of imparting and imbibing knowledge.

From ancient times up to the rise of European nationalism, after the fourteenth century, this geographical element of the University was the chief characteristic of its universality, namely, that it was an assemblage of teachers and students from **all nations**, in the then known world, for the promotion of higher learning. After that date, the emphasis shifted from nations to learning itself and it became truer to say that Universities were gatherings, communities,

where all branches of learning known at the time were dispensed and imbibed.

Influence

The University, like every human institution, has a twofold origin, a psychological, that is, a human need, and a historical.

The Genesis of the University sprang from the insatiate human craving for ever increasing knowledge. The workings of this craving, the stirrings of this urge, in the creation of this institution, were more evident in the early stages of its history, when other institutions that later played an active part, like the State and the Church, had not decided to take the initiative, or to bear a hand, in its establishment; when the University had not become the highly organised institution that we know it today.

There is, therefore, latent in man a demand, a thirst, for higher learning; and, whenever a teacher arose, notable for his talents and his attainments, a supply came into being, and scholars flocked from all sides, to drink at the spring. Therefore, what Cardinal Newman² has termed *influence*, that is, the irresistible attraction of a teacher of talent, attainment and repute, on young men, deeply desirous to render their knowledge more profound, was the essential cause of the emergence of Universities, especially in the early ages.

If any place in the Western World can claim to be the very fons et origo of Universities, Athens is the city that can rightly make that claim; for she was precisely the home of the earliest and the greatest philosophers, the mother of Western civilization; and, from the times of the earliest sages, till the days when barbarian hordes devastated the West, she was, in herself, a veritable University—students flocked to her from every nation for higher knowledge, and teachers went there, from all corners of the then known world, to put their learning at the students' disposal.

First in time came the Sophists, prominent among whom was Protagoras (485-410 B.C.). Plato, in one of his Dialogues, named after this philosopher, described what a stir his coming caused in Athens, among the youth, in the days when Socrates was young.

2. John Henry Cardinal Newman: *University Sketches*.

Socrates himself (according to Plato) tells the story in the following words:

"Last night, a little before daybreak, Hippocrates son of Apollodorus, Phason's brother, knocked violently on my door with his stick, and when it was opened, came straight in in a great hurry and shouted out:

"Socrates, are you awake or asleep?" I recognized his voice and said: 'That will be Hippocrates. No bad news I hope?' 'Nothing but good' he replied. 'I'm glad to hear it' said I. 'What is it then, and what brings you here at such an hour?' 'Protagoras has arrived', he said, taking his stand beside me. 'The day before yesterday. Have you only just found out?'

"Only last evening". As he said this he felt for the bed and sat by my feet, adding: 'Yes, yesterday evening, when I got back late from Oenoe. My slave Satyrus had run away from me. I meant to let you know that I was going after him, but something put it out of my head. When I got back and we had had dinner and were just going to bed, my brother mentioned to me that Protagoras had come. Late as it was, I nearly came to see you straight away, then I decided it was really too far into the night; but as soon as I had slept off my tiredness, I got up at once and came here as you see.'

I recognized his determination and the state of excitement he was in, and asked him: 'What is your concern in this? Has Protagoras done you any harm?'

"Of course he has," replied Hippocrates laughing. 'He keeps his wisdom to himself instead of sharing it with me'.

'Not at all' said I. 'If you pay him sufficient to persuade him, he will make you wise too'.

'If it were only a question of that' he said despairingly. 'I shouldn't keep back a penny of my own money, or my friends' money either. But this is just the reason why I have come to you, to persuade you to speak to him on my behalf. For one thing I am too young, and for another I have never seen nor heard Protagoras. Last time he came to Athens I was still a child. But you know, Socrates, everyone is singing his praises and saying that he

is the cleverest of speakers. Do let's pay him a visit at once, to make sure of finding him in. He's staying, so I'm told, with Callias son of Hipponicus. Come on."³

Another eloquent example of the rôle of influence in stimulating the thirst for higher learning is the story of the two Ambassadors-Philosophers, sent from Athens to Rome, during the time of the great Roman leader, Cato (234-149 B. C.). He, as Censor, eaten up by burning zeal to stamp out the luxury that was beginning to corrupt Rome, saw with dismay the enthusiasm that these philosophers had inkindled among the people, and artfully got them dispelled, lest the yearning for Philosophy and eloquence, rather than that for progress in arms, should emasculate the youth of Rome. The story is told by Plutarch:

"Marcus Cato was grown old, when Carneades the Academic, and Diogenes the Stoic, came as deputies from Athens to Rome, praying for release from a penalty of five hundred talents laid on the Athenians, in a suit, to which they did not appear, in which the Oropians were plaintiffs and Sicyonians judges. All the most studious youth immediately waited on these philosophers, and frequently, with admiration, heard them speak. But the gracefulness of Carneades's oratory, whose ability was really greatest, and his reputation equal to it, gathered large and favourable audiences, and ere long filled, like a wind, all the city with the sound of it. So that it soon began to be told that a Greek, famous even to admiration, winning and carrying all before him, had impressed so strange a love upon the young men, that quitting all their pleasures and pastimes, they ran mad, as it were, after philosophy; which indeed much pleased the Romans in general; nor could they but with pleasure see the youth receive so welcome the Greek literature, and frequent the company of learned men. But Cato, on the other side, seeing the passion for words flowing into the city, from the beginning took it ill, fearing lest the youth should be diverted that way, and so should prefer the glory of speaking well before that of arms and doing well. And when the fame of the philosophers increased in the city, and Caius Acilius, a person of distinction, at his own request, became their interpreter to the senate at their first audience, Cato resolved, under

3. Plato: Protagoras and Meno (translated by W. K. C. Guthrie, 1956): Penguin Classics: pages 39-40

some specious pretence, to have all philosophers cleared out of the city; and, coming into the senate, blamed the magistrates for letting these deputies stay so long a time without being despatched, though they were persons that could easily persuade the people to what they pleased; that therefore in all haste something should be determined about their petition, that so they might go home again to their own schools, and declaim to the Greek children, and leave the Roman youth to be obedient, as hitherto, to their own laws and governors."⁴

Next to the Sophists came Socrates himself (470-339 B. C.) and we know that his influence on young men was so great that, in the end, he was tried and condemned on the charge of misleading them and on a charge of impiety.

Plato (428-348 B. C.), his disciple and one of the greatest philosophers of all time, followed in his wake, and not only elaborated the system of philosophy for which he is celebrated, but also founded the **Academy**, his famous School, for propagating his ideas.

After him came his disciple Aristotle, the philosopher who has exerted the greatest single influence on European thought and culture from his day to our own. He too founded at the **Lyceum** in Athens, the institute which has come down to us as the **Peripatetic School**, so called from this philosopher's habit of lecturing while walking around the grounds with his pupils.

Athens fostered learning not only through her philosophers but also through her other institutions; for she was not only the home of **Thought** but also the home of the **Beautiful**, the cradle of **Democracy**. She had her celebrated sculptures, paintings, temples; she had the famous theatre where the deathless plays of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus were acted; she had her political institutions.

This aspect of the history of Athens and Greece illustrates the rôle of **influence**, that is, the action of personality, the intercourse of soul with soul, the inter-play of mind upon mind, in the genesis of universities.

4. Plutarch's Lives, Vol. 1 p. 537. Everyman's Library. 407

But the influence of masters however talented, however learned, however reputed, was proved, by experience, to be inadequate, for these sages, more often than not, were destitute men without the means to develop the institutions they initiated and render their action more effective. The help and the protection of wealthy and powerful patrons or institutions, especially the State, was found to be absolutely necessary for the growth of Universities.

The first such patron of culture and learning was Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.).

Alexander, son of Philip of Macedon and heir to his throne, was also the pupil of Aristotle. And thanks to this philosopher, who was also one of the greatest political scientists and literary theorists that the world has produced, the young prince acquired two qualities which were to have far-reaching effects, namely, a genius for administration and organisation, on the one hand, and a love of learning, on the other. A mere youth of twenty, on his father's death, he took up arms for the conquest of the world, subjugated Egypt, where he founded the city that is named after him, overran the Middle East, and pushed onward to the banks of the Indus in India. His troops refusing to go further, he repaired to Babylon where he died, shortly after, from an attack of malaria. Thanks to this union of the genius for sovereignty with an energetic devotion to letters, Alexander did what hardly any other conqueror of antiquity ever did. Neither Hannibal (247-183 B.C.), nor Caesar (101-44 B.C.) with all his cultivation of mind, conquered to civilise. But Alexander, both by his political institutions and his patronage of Science, sowed the seeds of culture as he went along. He was not destined however, as we have seen, to carry on this work himself for long, but his successors after him had caught his spirit and carried on his enterprise. For when he died, his empire was shared between two of his generals. Asia Minor fell to Eumenes; and Egypt with its capital at Alexandria fell to Ptolemy.

It is Ptolemy who supplies us with the first great instance of the establishment of letters; for he and Eumenes may be considered as the first founders of public libraries. Under the Ptolemys, a great system was set on foot for collecting together into one, and handing down to posterity, the oracles of the world's wisdom. It is said that, in the reign of the second Ptolemy, the volumes housed

in the Alexandrian Library amounted to 100,000; in due course they grew to 400,000 and finally to about 700,000 volumes, as volumes were then formed. After lasting for over a thousand years this library was deliberately burnt by the Seracens when they took Alexandria.

The Museum in Alexandria

A library, however, was only one of the two great conceptions brought into execution by the first Ptolemy for the promotion of learning. For, prompted by Demetrius of Phalerus, he carried through a plan for the formal endowment of literature and science and founded a seat of learning, which he called the **Museum**, and supplied it with ample revenues. This institution combined with the library to make Alexandria a veritable University city. Thanks to this twofold institution, Alexandria superceded Athens as the intellectual capital of the world; and masters and students, allured by these facilities, flocked there from all parts of the then known world; and, for hundreds of years after, in fact, right up to the days of the early Church, this city became the abode of distinguished men and the centre of profound studies in Grammar, Rhetoric, Poetry, Philosophy, Astronomy, Music, Medicine, and other arts and sciences.

The **Museum** of Alexandria made its greatest contributions in the fields of Medicine and Mathematics; for Galen, the celebrated Physician flourished in it. As for Mathematics, of four great ancient names on whom modern science is founded, three came from Alexandria: Archimedes was from Syracuse; but Diophantus and Apollonius of Perga were products of the **Museum**; so was the celebrated Euclid whose system of Geometry is known, and loved or detested, by every school boy.

Some of the outstanding writers and doctors of the early Church came from the **Museum**; prominent among them were Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Athanasius and St. Gregory Thaumaturgos.

Rome Takes Over

With the rise of Rome, as we all know, Greece, as a political power, had to yield to the new ruler of the world. But about the influence of Greece on Rome, Horace has a very famous passage in the first Epistle of his second book.

"Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes
 Intulit agresti Latio: sic horridus ille
 Defluxit numerus Saturnius, et grave virus
 Munditiæ pepulere..."

"Greece captured made her savage captor captive and brought her accomplishments into rustic Latium. Consequently, the wild Saturnian verse passed out of use and elegance expelled the noxious venom of satire."

The Romans, with all their military might, had the humility to recognise a cultural superior when they saw one; had the humility to sit at his feet to learn; and, as a result, Roman students flocked to Athens, and Greek thought and art and letters transformed the Roman civilization. Among the Romans who went to drink at the Athenian fount of learning were such eminent writers as Horace himself, Cicero, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

This reverence for Greek culture, on the part of the Romans, never waned. For Pliny the younger (61-113 A.D.) years later, writing to one Maximus who had been appointed governor of Greece admonished him in these terms:

"Cogita te missum in provinciam Achaiam, illam veram et mæram Græciam, in qua primum humanitas, litteræ, etiam fruges inventæ esse creduntur, missum ad ordinatum statum liberarum civitatum. Id est, ad homines maxime homines ad liberos maxime liberos, quibus a natura datum virtutis, meritis, amicitia, foedere denique a religione tenerunt. Revere conditores deos et numina deorum, revere gloriam veterem et hanc ipsam senectutem, quæ in hominibus venerabilis, in urbibus sacra. Sit apud te honor antiquitatis, in ingenitibus factis, sit fabulis quoque. Nihil ex cuiusquam dignitate nihil ex libertate, nihil etiam ex iactatione decerpseris. Habeant quoque hanc esse terram, quæ nobis miserit iura, qua leges non vicis sed potentibus dedit..."

"Consider that you have been sent into the province of Achaia, that true and original Greece in which first civilisation, literature, even agriculture are believed to have been discovered, sent to regulate the condition of free communities, that is, sent to men who are truly men, free men who are truly free, who have maintained their natural rights by valour, by glorious feats, by friendship by a contract in fact sanctioned by religion. Venerate the gods

that founded the cities and the divine powers, honour their ancient glory and their present declining years, which in the case of a man command respect, in the case of cities awe. Pay respect to them in their antiquity, to the great deeds of their past, even to their legends. Diminish nothing from any man's dignity, liberty or even vanity. Bear in mind that this is the country which sent us our laws, that she did not give us enactments after conquering us, but on our own petition. »5

It is no wonder then that the masters of the Roman Empire, in so far as education was concerned, sought to emulate the good example of the Ptolemys. Teaching and learning were made a department of government and schools were set up and professors endowed, just in the same way as soldiers were stationed or courts opened, in the principal cities of the Empire. In Rome itself the seat of Education was in the Capitol. Of schools planted throughout the Empire, the most considerable were the Gallic and the African of which the former had a very high repute: Massilia (now Marseilles) one of the oldest of the Greek colonies, was the most celebrated of the schools of Gaul for learning and for discipline; it was here that Agricola received his Education. The Roman schools differed from the Alexandrian Museum in that, for the most part, they were devoted to the education of the young—*adolescentuli*—and had no reference to the advancement of science; Agricola came to Marseilles, when a child—*parvulus*. Their curriculum consisted of the Trivium and Quadrivium, that is, the three lower and the four higher of the seven liberal arts comprising, on the one hand, Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic, and, on the other, the Mathematical Sciences—Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy—and Music. To these were added Greek, Philosophy, Roman Law, and, later on, Medicine.

Such was the genesis and the early development of higher education, such were the beginnings of Universities in ancient times. Through the genius and the energy of individuals, through the mission of single cities, knowledge was spread around the basin of the Mediterranean. And, thanks to its intimate alliance with political power, embodied in Alexander, the Ptolemys and the Caesars, learning received the means both of its cultivation and its propagation.

5. C. Plini: *Epistularum* VIII, 24.

Unfortunately, the history of the advance of higher Education was not destined to be so smooth. For it suffered reverses at the hands of the northern hordes that laid the Roman Empire low—Goth, the Hun, the Lombard. The progress of letters and science would have been halted for ever but for this that another power came to the rescue and sheltered the treasures of ancient learning during the convulsions; and bridged the abyss, and linked the old world to the new. This new protector of learning was the Church.

The barbarian invaders came in waves and their work of devastation went on, with moments of respite, now and again, from about the third to the sixth century. They spread all over the Empire like flights of locusts, and did their best to destroy every fragment of the old civilization and every promise of revival; for they directed their fury against the ancient culture, against the institutions which it was embodied. It had become the fashion and the luxury not only for every city in the Empire, but also for every colony and municipium, every temple and praetorium, even private villas, to have their own collection of books; Rome alone counted twenty-nine public libraries. But in their savage ignorance the invaders destroyed wherever they found them. Thus they appropriated to themselves the territory of the Empire but not its civilization. From Germany and the north eastern territories outside the sway of Rome they swept into Gaul, Spain, Italy; they crossed over into Africa. For some time, Alexandria was spared, and it seemed that its Museum would survive as a hope for the revival of learning. But a century later Alexandria was taken and its library burnt by the Saracens, an invader whose fury was even fiercer than that of the western barbarians.

As I have said above, these savage hordes could have succeeded in wiping out learning, completely, from the face of Europe, were it not for one power that withstood and survived them—the Church. And the Church preserved learning, thanks to her things—her monasteries, and the conversion of the Irish.

The Germanic peoples, that laid the Roman Empire and civilization low, swept mainly south-ward. A branch of them, however, the Angles and the Saxons, turned westward and crossed the

Channel into Britain, and settled in that part of the country that is now present-day England. Thereafter, this island received no more of the dreaded visitations.

But her sister island farther to the west, then Hibernia, now Ireland, was spared the fury of the barbarian invader. Ireland was converted to Christianity, thanks to the labours of St. Patrick, in the first half of the fifth century. It was a country with nothing of that urban organisation that characterised the Roman Empire. There were no cities in which to place its bishops. Thus it was that the seat of the primitive Irish See was a kind of clerical village, founded for that purpose, where dwelt together bishop and clergy, monks and nuns. Because of this community life, these clerical settlements became monasteries, and, thus, the early Irish Church developed a marked monastic character. And in these monasteries two main pursuits formed the exclusive ambition of its inmates—sanctity and learning. Thus the Ireland of that era became the seat of a flourishing Church abounding in Saints and Scholars.

Owing to the fact that, after the Anglo-Saxon invasion, Britain was not visited by the scourge of another barbaric host, the Christian Church was able to take a new birth, thanks to the zeal of Pope Gregory the Great, who, having seen some Angle slaves in the market of Rome, determined, as he put it himself, to **make the Angles Angels**; and sent St. Augustine, the first Bishop of Canterbury, to carry out this task.

Thus, when the old world passed away, with its wealth and wisdom, these two Isles of the North became the storehouse of the past and the birth place of the future; the Celt and the Anglo-Saxon became the preservers, the cultivators, the custodians, and the propagators of learning, sacred and secular. It was thence, that, when the surges of the barbarian invasions had subsided, learning returned to continental Europe.

But, in this work of civilization, the Celt preceded the Anglo-Saxon; for Britain itself was partly christianised by Irishmen, notable among whom was St. Columba, the Apostle of the Picts and the Scots; many English Sees, notably that of Northumbria, were founded by them; and, for many years, the famous Abbeys of Lindisfarne and Malmesbury were peopled by Irish monks and their Anglo-Saxon disciples. Some of these Irish missionaries crossed over to the continent; prominent among these were St. Fridolin

who evangelised in France and in the Rhineland, and the famous Columbanus, whose missionary labours carried him to France, Burgundy, Switzerland and Lombardy, where he died.

The schools in the Irish cloisters, at this time, were the most famous in the West. Strangers in search of learning flocked to Ireland, not only from neighbouring Britain, but from remote nations on the Continent.

The seventh and the eight centuries saw an increased effort, on the part of the Anglo-Saxons, in this evangelising and civilising enterprise. English Benedictine monks pushed into Germany and founded monasteries on which they settled down, to sing their chants and copy old manuscripts; and, thus, to lay the slow but sure foundations of the new civilization. Most prominent among these English missionaries was the Devonshireman Winfrid, more known as St. Boniface, the Apostle of Germany.

Such was the providential part played by these Northern Islands in the preservation and the propagation of European civilization. In lay and sacred learning, this period of their history is adorned by such illustrious names as those of John Scotus Erigena, the Irish philosopher, and Bede the Venerable, the English saint and Doctor of the Church.

Charles the Great

When Charlemagne arose on the Continent, this special mission of the Celt and the Anglo-Saxon came to an end. Yet they were not superceded, till they had formally handed over the tradition of learning to the schools of France. For it was Alcuin, the Anglo-Saxon, who, on the invitation of Charlemagne himself, became the first Rector of the *Studium Generale* that developed into the University of Paris. An Irishman, Clement, succeeded Alcuin, and, another, John, founded the School of Pavia.

The contribution of Charlemagne to the spread of Christianity, to the revival of learning, in this dark age, was so vast and so far-reaching that some have not hesitated to call him the founder of modern European civilization. We would understand better what he did, by first knowing who he was.

When the conflagrations that wiped out the Roman Empire had subsided, several kingdoms rose up, phoenix like, from its ashes. Foremost among these was that which the Franks set up in what was

Roman Gaul—modern France. At the beginning of the eighth century, this kingdom came under the powerful influence of Charles, Mayor of the Palace of the Frankish king, surnamed the Hammer, because of the repeated slaughter with which he beat the Arab invaders that were swarming over into France from Spain. In 751, Pepin, his son, who had succeeded him as Mayor of the Palace, felt himself so strong that he seized the kingship itself. Charles the Great or Charlemagne (768-814) succeeded Pepin and proved himself the mightiest warrior of this warlike family.

He proved himself to be the greatest figure that Western Europe had seen since Julius Caesar; in the history of the world he is lined with Alexander and Napoleon. He carried war into all directions and before long had made himself master of Spain, Italy and Germany and penetrated into the heart of Hungary, and became the Lord of the Western World.

On Christmas day, in the year 800, at St. Peter's in Rome, Pope Leo III crowned him Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

Next to the extension of his empire, Charlemagne had two other ambitions: the spread of the Church, and the promotion of learning.

Charles was not a mere brutal soldier; he was an educated man, a political idealist whose absorbing purpose was to organise the City of God on earth according to the principles laid down in St. Augustine's book, *De Civitate Dei*. For the first time in history, the Church had found a political genius wholly devoted to the task of realising the ideals of the gospel, whose burning ambition was to gain the world for Christ. In fact, so extreme was this zeal, that Charles dragooned entire peoples into Catholicism, and compelled them, by force, to receive baptism. Never before, and certainly never since, has catholicism been so identified with a political régime.

He had insight enough to realise that piety that is not informed by sound doctrine is shallow. Thus the education of the clergy was one of his foremost preoccupations; he could not but realise also that, in order to run his vast empire, he needed the help of educated men; and his responsibilities made him painfully aware of the degree of the intellectual barbarism of Frankish Gaul. Thus Charlemagne became the greatest patron of learning since Alexander and the Ptolemys.

In the first place, he turned his attention to the Episcopal seminaries: these had been institutions of the earliest times of Christianity, but had been, in great measure, interrupted amid the dissolution of society, consequent upon the barbarian inroads.

To these he added the grammar and public schools, as preparatory both to the seminaries and to secular professions. Each cathedral and monastery had to have such a school.

But what claims our special attention here is Charlemagne's contribution to the promotion of higher learning. The first thing is that he sought out eminent scholars, from all over Europe, and invited them to settle and work in his realm. In England, one of St. Bede's pupils, Egbert, promoted to be Archbishop of York, had founded there a school which, at the time of Charlemagne's accession, was the intellectual centre of Europe. It was Egbert's pupil Alciun, head of the school of York, and the greatest scholar of the time, whom Charlemagne, as we have seen, persuaded to come over and settle in Gaul. He invited others from Italy and Spain.

It is asserted that Charlemagne founded not only grammar or public schools, as already said, but also the higher *Studia Generalia*, especially the *Studium Generale* which later developed into the University of Paris; that he confined these greater schools to certain central and celebrated spots in his Empire, places like Paris, Pavia and Bologna; and that he intended them, not only for ecclesiastics but also for the nobility and their children, as well as for poor scholars; that is, for every rank, class and race. In this he was in line with the ancient promoters of learning whose efforts had given rise to the Athenian School in Greece, the Alexandrian School in Egypt; and to those of Rome and Constantinople, under the Roman Emperors.

Although it can be debated whether the higher schools of Charlemagne were Universities in the strict sense of the term, it is beyond question that he commenced the noble work; without doing everything which had to be done, he did many things, and opened the way for more; he laid down principles from which the University sprang and grew, in that he aimed at educating all classes, and undertook the teaching of all branches of learning.

The Middle Ages

But in the succeeding centuries, especially in the Middle Ages, and, most especially, in the thirteenth century, when no patron of learning as powerful and as zealous as Charles the Great came forward, events proved that such benefactors were not absolutely indispensable, for the creation and the growth of Universities. Even when they existed, they could only supply external aid and a frame work for the *Studium Generale*. But the real growth of Universities depended fundamentally and absolutely on a force innate to themselves—what Cardinal Newman, as I said before, termed *influence*, namely, that force of attraction which teachers of talent and attainment exert in a milieu where the thirst of knowledge is at work.

It was this influence, the principle of supply and demand, the existence of teachers of genius, the intrinsic attraction of knowledge, that caused Universities like Paris, Pavia, Bologna, Padua, Ferrara, Pisa, Naples, Vienna, Louvain, Oxford and Cambridge to rise or grow, at the voice of the philosopher or the theologian.

To take a few examples.

Bologna is celebrated in history for its cultivation of legal science, and was, at least, one of the earliest, if not the very earliest, of European Universities. A certain Imerius or Ivarner opened a school of civil law there at the end of the eleventh century; in the following century canon law was added, and, early in the thirteenth, a school of grammar and literature and those of theology and medicine.

Paris affords us a very striking example of how a University grows, thanks to the influence it exerts. For its school, from the beginning of the twelfth century, counted among its professors a galaxy of the highest talent in the history of medieval learning—William of Champeaux, the celebrated Peter Abelard, who, with great *éclat*, taught, there, humanities and the philosophy of Aristotle, Peter Lombard, Alberic of Rheims, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the twelfth century, a certain Vacarius or Baccalarius came up from Bologna to Oxford and effected a revolution in the studies of the place, by the devotion he kindled for the study of law, and by the rival zeal this aroused in the schools of the arts and of medicine.

At Cambridge, the intellectual movement, which had already begun was greatly stimulated by the arrival there of four French monks who had been sent thither by Jeoffred, or Goisfred the Abbot of Groyland, who, himself, had studied at Orleans in France. They were versed in sacred learning and in Philosophy and attracted large crowds to their lectures.

These examples are very sketchy but they serve to show that thanks to the self-originating, independent character of the scientific movement, thanks to the attraction of genius, thanks to the force of the law of supply and demand, Universities continued their vigorous growth, in the Middle Ages, in spite of the absence of a patron, of the stature of Charlemagne.

Up to this period, the basic University studies were the Arts, and the Faculty of Arts constituted the staple, as it were, of the University; in fact, it was the University. By the arts then were meant the two sets of studies that I have mentioned before, that is, the **Trivium** and the **Quadrivium**, namely, Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic on the one hand, and Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music on the other. These were inherited from the ancient world, and were the foundation of the system which was then in the course of formation. But the life of the medieval Universities lay in the new sciences for which a sound grounding in the traditional studies served as a very useful, even indispensable prerequisite. Among the new sciences were Theology, Metaphysics, Law, Medicine, History, Languages.

Organisation

As time wore on, two factors arose and proved that, although the attraction of genius, and zeal for knowledge, could be sufficient, in themselves, for the **esse** or the **being** of a University, they were not sufficient for its **bene esse** or its **well-being**, which has been technically called its integrity.

These two factors were the increase in members and the multiplication of the sciences. They brought to light the importance of another principle very vital for the life and the success of the University, namely, organisation: organisation of the student body, organisation of the studies.

Hitherto, with regard to the former, that is, the organisation of the student body, there had been but one governor over the students, who were but few and mostly from the neighbourhood.

Now with the increase in the student population, it became necessary to divide them up into groups, and this was done on the basis of the part of Europe from which they came; and each group was called a Nation, and was placed under a head, who bore the title of Procurator or Proctor. There was nothing new in this, for, back in ancient Athens, students had been grouped on the same basis into Attic, Oriental, Arab and Pontic.

Just as the metropolitan character of the University gave rise to Nations and their Proctors, in the same manner, its encyclopedic profession produced the Faculties and their Deans. According to the institutions of Charlemagne, each school had its own teacher, who was called Rector or Master; in Paris, Chancellor; elsewhere Provost. Even at the early stages, when the curriculum comprised the **Trivium** and the **Quadrivium**, it was difficult to find teachers qualified to profess all these seven sciences. But they became only parts of a whole system of instruction, which demanded, in addition, a knowledge of philosophy, scholastic theology, civil and canon law, medicine, natural history and the Semitic Languages; and no one person alone could be equal to such a vast undertaking. The Rector fell back from his position of teacher to that of governor; and the instruction was divided among a board of Doctors each of whom represented a special province in Science. This is the origin of Deans of Faculties; and in as much as they undertook among themselves one of those departments of academic duty, which the Rector or Chancellor had hitherto fulfilled, they naturally became his Council. In some places the Proctors of the nations were added to this Council.

Another institution which emerged about this time in the life of Universities was the conferring of degrees. At first, they were only testimonials that a resident was fit to take part in the public teaching of the place. It was only later on that degrees became honours or testimonials, to be enjoyed by persons who left the University and mixed in the world. In the beginning, the University conferred them for its own purposes, to its own subjects, for the sake of its own subjects. But the recognition of the University by the State and by other Universities enhanced the importance and the dignity of degrees. However, the formal words by which they were denoted still preserved the memory of their early connection with teaching. For the students on whom they were conferred

red were called *Magistri*, that is, of the Schools, or *Doctores* and in some places *Professores*.

It was during this period that the term *Studium Generale*, applied, up to this, to institutes of higher learning, faded away and gave way to the title of *Universitas Magistrorum et Scholarium*, or *Universitas* for short, that is, the whole body of teachers and students associated together as a society or a corporate body.

According to Cardinal Newman, the *Studium Generale* acquired the name *Universitas* firstly because of membership and secondly because of the nature of its studies: it was the assemblage of strangers—teachers and students—from all parts, all countries, into one place, it opened its gates wide to scholars of all classes; it had for its profession the teaching of universal knowledge, all branches of higher learning.

The first characteristic, the geographical universality of Universities, was very marked indeed, in the middle ages, and this was made far easier still by the religious and the linguistic unity of Western Europe at the time—the Roman Church held undisputed sway and Latin was the universal language of scholarship. For instance, of the galaxy of professors who made Paris famous, at the time of which I am talking, few were fellow countrymen. St. Albert the Great came from Germany, St. Thomas from Naples, Peter Lombard from Novara, Robert Pullus from Exeter in England. Sometimes students were not content to study in one place but went the round of Universities to study at the feet of the most celebrated masters, and to get the best instruction in every school. There was also much co-operation among the Universities in so far as professors were concerned; it is said that exchanges of professors between Oxford and Paris were very frequent. With regard to the nationalities of the students, even a University at remote from Europe as Oxford, at a time when travelling was so difficult and dangerous, could count among its students Scots, Welsh, Irish, French, Spaniards, Germans, Bohemians, Hungarians, Poles. Such was the geographical universality of Universities, thanks to the religious and the linguistic bond that bound Europe together.

But as centuries rolled round, the spirit of nationalism awoke and grew, rivalries among peoples waxed into endless wars, national languages took over from Latin and the gulf grew wider.

finally, the Reformation came and made an end of religious unity. Consequent on these developments the ecumenical greatness of the Universities declined, and they became, in the main, national institutions, with regard to their membership.

They could remain genuine Universities by reason of the second principle which, together with their former international character, conferred on them the note of universality, namely, the fact that, in spite of having become national, they remained faithful to their mission to promote, develop and hand down knowledge in all the branches of higher learning known at the time.

Speaking of Athens as a seat of learning, Cardinal Newman has given us in a lyrical passage, clear and succinct, an idea of what a University is.

"If we would know," says he, "what a University is, considered in its elementary idea, we must betake ourselves to the first and most celebrated home of European literature, and source of European civilization, to the bright and beautiful Athens—Athens, whose schools drew to her bosom, and then sent back again to the business of life, the youth of the Western World for a long thousand years. Seated on the verge of Continent, the city seemed hardly suited for the duties of a central metropolis of knowledge; yet, what it lost in convenience of approach, it gained in its neighbourhood to the traditions of the mysterious East, and in the loveliness of the region in which it lay. Hither, then, as to a sort of ideal land, where all archetypes of the great and the fair were found in substantial being, and all departments of truth explored, and all diversities of intellectual power exhibited, where taste and philosophy were majestically enthroned as in a royal court, where there was no sovereignty but that of mind, and no nobility but that of genius, where professors were rulers, and princes did homage; hither flocked continually from the very corners of the orbis terrarum, the many-tongued generation, just rising, or just risen into manhood, to gain wisdom.

The salient points of this passage need stressing and clenching.

Where all departments of truth are explored; where all diversities of intellectual power are exhibited; where there is no sovereignty

6. John Henry Cardinal Newman: *University Sketches*, page 17; Browne and Nolan Limited, Dublin.

reignty but that of mind, no nobility but that of genius; where professors are rulers do homage; where the rising manhood flock for wisdom, from all corners of the *orbis terrarum*;—such is the University.

It is not my intention here to go into the nature of the University as it exists in our day, nor into the merits and demerits of the various systems of university teaching and organisation existing in various countries, nor into the causes of the current convulsions and upheavals that are shaking the world's Universities today to their deep-most depths and calling into question the centuries old, the consecrated, almost sacred traditions and foundations on which the University has stood, up to this.

Of these, there shall be question later on—if time allows. For the moment I must turn my attention to a problem which, to my mind, is of the highest and the most primordial importance, namely, the **Nature, the End and the Purpose** of University studies.

This article is Copyright and Distributed under the following license



**Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike
CC BY-NC-SA**

This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.

[View License Deed](#) | [View Legal Code](#)

Cet article est protégé par le droit d'auteur et distribué sous la licence suivante



**Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation
Commerciale - Partage dans les Mêmes
Conditions CC BY-NC-SA**

Cette licence permet aux autres de remixier, arranger, et adapter votre œuvre à des fins non commerciales tant qu'on vous crédite en citant votre nom et que les nouvelles œuvres sont diffusées selon les mêmes conditions.

[Voir le Résumé Explicatif](#) | [Voir le Code Juridique](#)

Copyright and Take Down notice

The digitized version of Abbia seeks to honour the original intentions of the paper publication. We continue to publish under the patronage of the Ministry of Arts and Culture: permission for this was given by the minister of Arts and Culture on 9 August 2019 Ref 1752/L/MINAC/SG/DLL/.. It has not proved possible to track down the surviving authors so we are making the material available under a more restrictive noncommercial CC license. We have setup a takedown policy to accommodate this. More details are available from [here](#).

La version numérisée d'Abbia vise à honorer les intentions originales de la publication sur papier. Nous continuons à publier sous le patronage du Ministère des Arts et de la Culture: permission a été donné par le ministre le 9 August 2019 Ref 1752/L/MINAC/SG/DLL/. Il n'a pas été possible de retrouver les auteurs survivants, c'est pourquoi nous rendons le matériel disponible sous une licence CC non commerciale plus restrictive. Nous avons mis en place une politique de démantèlement pour y faire face. Plus de détails sont disponibles [ici](#).