

## The Medieval University

by  
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“A Clerk there was of Oxenforde also  
That un-to logik hadde longe y-go”

With these words Chaucer introduces another character in that motley band of pilgrims cantering to the shrine of St. Thomas. In some twenty lines he had given us one of those thumb-nail sketches that still delight his readers. We see a scholar, poor in this world's comforts, but rich in wisdom:

“Of studio took he most cure and most hede.  
Noght o word spake he more than was nede,  
And that was seyð in forme and reverence,  
And short and quik, and full of hy sentence.  
Souninge in moral vertu was his speche,  
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.”

What brought him into such a strange company of fellows, how he fitted in with them is no part of this paper. Yet with the knight, the friar, the wife of Bath, and the others of the company he is part of medieval England and fully deserves his place with that immortal band of pilgrims.

Of course it is hardly necessary to add that Chaucer's clerk was not a typical medieval student, even if such there ever were. Such unworldly – almost said unnatural – devotion to study could hardly be predicated of all students.

Let us take some young lad and follow him through a medieval university. Where shall we send him, for different universities were early noted for their specialties? The boy's father, a physician of some repute, might be anxious for him to follow his footsteps to Salerno, while his uncle might stress the advantages of Bologna and law. A canon of the cathedral, on the other hand, might push the claims of Paris in philosophy and theology. For these three were the archetypes of medieval universities. Every other university was a conscious and deliberate imitation of Paris or Bologna; what differences there were, were due to adaptation to local circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

But the time for decision might be some years off; the boy is young and not sufficiently prepared for university studies. While academic entrance requirements

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<sup>1</sup> Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, [ed. Powicke and Emden], Oxford University Press, 1936, I, p. 17.

were not a matter of university legislation,<sup>2</sup> it is scarcely conceivable that a youth go to a university without being able to read, write, and understand Latin, the language of instruction in all faculties in all universities. Naturally the students' knowledge varied some were fluent, some knew little. The dullards could get by for a time, even for a lengthy time, since there were no mid-term tests or yearly examinations; nothing but the examinations immediately preceding the degree. But eventually the dullard and the play-boy would tire of the life and drop out.

There were of course grammar schools for boys and girls; more indeed than is commonly thought. In university towns the university was able to exercise considerable jurisdiction over these grammar schools.<sup>3</sup> The majority of students received instruction in the rudiments nearer home: monastic schools, cathedral schools, lay schools. The sons of the great might be taught by the family chaplain; while chantry and village priests might take under their wings, promising youths. Latin seems to have received the greatest emphasis; even the most elementary did the Psalms at least, with the more advanced schools going on to Ovid and possibly Virgil.<sup>4</sup> In the better schools some logic was taught. Grammar school education seems hardly to have been considered an end in itself, but rather as a preparation for university work; and in the university schools the transition from grammar school to university was almost imperceptible.

We follow our youthful country innocent to the university town of his choosing. Of the town itself there is little to hold his attention; the cathedral, it is true, was probably larger and grander than anything he had seen; there were more streets than in his home town, with more shops and inns and places to spend his money.

But time enough to see the city later. Our student is anxious to see the university – the centre of his life for the years to come. If he is as innocent as we portray him, he shall indeed look a long time in vain for the university. The medieval university was not primarily an imposing pile of buildings; there were no libraries, museums, laboratories, handsomely appointed and cared for. Even the medieval charm of Oxford colleges is a product of the Tudor period. "The universities in their earliest days had no buildings, of their own ... The lecture room or school was simply a hired apartment, or the private house of the doctor."<sup>5</sup> The university was, in a phrase that Haskins quotes, "built of men";<sup>6</sup> its wealth lay not in mortar and stones, but in the minds of its masters and scholars. On great occasions it was customary to use a church or the cathedral. Not until the fifteenth

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* III, p. 342, "there was no such thing as an entrance examination, except in the colleges."

<sup>3</sup> Thorndike, *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages*, New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1944, pp. 239-40.

<sup>4</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, III, p. 351.

<sup>5</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> Haskins, *The Rise of the Universities*, New York, 1923, p. 5.

century do we find that the universities definitely began to establish themselves in permanent buildings; and even then, the way was led by the colleges.

Our young hero is quickly seized upon for what he is; a 'bejaunus,' yellow-beak, or in modern parlance, a freshman. As such he is a prey for the merchants, hawkers and touts of all professions. The masters of Toulouse in their advertisement speak of the "courtesy of the people" and their "courtly good Humour."<sup>7</sup> But the frequent squabbles of town-and-gown reveal that such good feelings were not common. But several thousand students<sup>8</sup> represent an important element in the economic life of a town or city; and the townspeople may well have been anxious to have a university without themselves being interested in higher learning. Indeed, the threat to move the university from the town, quite possible in the absence of permanent buildings, was frequently enough to bring the city fathers to heel. Still, the exemption of masters and students from the ordinary courts, the powers of the university to fix rentals and to blacklist offenders<sup>9</sup> in this matter undoubtedly led to hard feelings, and to hard blows.

After evading the efforts of the townspeople, the young student now seeks out some temporary dwelling-place in an inn or hostel, until he can find his bearings. While there, it was not unlikely that he would be approached by a 'touting' master, or one of the latter's students working on a commission, to attend the master's lectures. The nature of this sales talk, we can well imagine. Modern professors would be horrified at having to sell their product, as a tradesman; but it must be borne in mind that masters were not salaried men, and depended for their livelihood on the fees of their own students. And the more students they could attract to their lectures, the more secure was their living. "In the matter of lectures, indeed, a trial was respectfully solicited with all the accommodating obsequiousness of a modern tradesman."<sup>10</sup> Such a system of touting however, was not approved by the university and the practice was several times condemned.<sup>11</sup>

The youthful student, after gaining the refuge of his room and closing the door upon his besiegers, might well be thinking, 'Just what is a university?' A fair question; and one which may occur to us. We might answer briefly with Prof. Haskins: "our first and best definition of a university [is] a society of masters and scholars."<sup>12</sup> The word 'universitas' originally had not the special and technical meaning which we attach to 'university.' In the early middle ages it meant simply a number of people, as '*universitas vestra*, the whole of you'; indeed it was

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<sup>7</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> As is likely at Paris, though fewer elsewhere; for numbers of students, cfr. Rashdall, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 325-38.

<sup>9</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, III, p. 355.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 354, n. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Haskins, *The Rise of the Universities*, p. 9.

applied to the various guilds and to any legal body. But it did not mean a school in which all or many branches of knowledge were taught.

The term which most closely approaches the meaning which today we give to university is *studium generale*; and this means, according to Rashdall, “not a place where all subjects are studied, but a place where students from all parts are received.”<sup>13</sup> This seems to have been the main requirement of a *studium generale*. It was also recognized that such a *studium* must be a place of higher education, something above the level of the grammar school. In short, it must contain at least one of the higher faculties. Again, it was required that these subjects be taught by a considerable number of masters. In the case of the earlier *studia* these requirements seem to have been demanded by custom and usage, rather than by authority. Later *studia*, founded by papal or imperial charter, often included some such requirements; but since these *studia* were merely copies of the earlier, their charters expressed only what custom had dictated for the earlier *studia*.

It was characteristic of the title of master in a *studium generale* that it carried the *jus ubique docendi*; in fact, this privilege “came to be regarded as the principal object of papal or imperial creation.”<sup>14</sup> In theory, then, a master had the right to be accepted on the faculty of any *studium*, without his qualifications being questioned. In practice, it was often otherwise, in spite of the edict of pope or emperor. While the different *studia* were insistent, then as now, that their *licentiae docendi* be recognized by others, they were not always willing, then as now, to acknowledge this right in other *studia*. A master of Bologna or of Paris would be pained to be placed on the same footing as a master from Saragossa or Erfurt. Even the pope bowed on occasion to this; in granting the masters of Salamanca the *jus ubique docendi*, pope Alexander explicitly excepts Paris and Bologna.<sup>15</sup>

Originally there was no necessary connection between ‘university’ and *studium generale*. A common phrase, *universitas magistrorum et scholarum* might mean nothing more than ‘all of you masters and students,’ while the *studium generale* was a “school of general resort.”<sup>16</sup> But such indefiniteness could hardly long attach to ‘university’; and it soon came to mean an organization along the lines of the craft guilds. Indeed, there is an interesting parallel, which suggests conscious imitation, between the craft guilds with their apprentices, journeymen, and masters, and the scholastic guilds with their students, bachelors, and masters. Gradually the distinction between *universitas* and *studium generale* was lost; and by the fifteenth century the two are synonymous, denoting “not merely a school with the *jus ubique docendi* ... but a scholastic organization of a particular type and endowed with more or less uniform privileges.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 16.

It will be profitable to consider for a few moments the purpose of medieval education; indeed, the purpose of medieval life. The implications of St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei* had, by the middle ages, permeated Christian society. The citizen of the Heavenly State must needs know the duties and obligations involved in citizenship in this State; in short, he must know what God intends for man, God's plan of life for man. And it was the problem of medieval learning to find that plan as completely as the human intellect could. The business of the medieval historian, according to R. G. Collingwood, was 'To narrate the gesta Dei. He saw history not as a mere play of human purposes ... but as a process,... wherein even the most intelligent and powerful human agent finds himself involved, not because God is destructive and mischievous, as in Herodotus, but because God is provident and constructive, has a plan of his own... The great task of medieval historiography was the task of discovering and expounding this objective or divine plan.'<sup>18</sup> It would, of course, be presumptuous to imagine the historian as some specially favoured and enlightened soul; he was but a man of his times, sharing the same idealism as other learned men. And this idealism, as Sir Maurice Powicke writes, "was nothing more nor less than the desire that every man should live the good life and do honestly what God has given him to do. The medieval tracts about education – and they are numerous – are moral tracts."<sup>19</sup>

I cannot leave this subject without digressing somewhat, in order to bring to your attention a pertinent observation by Sir Maurice.

"Our modern educational systems were forced upon us because – at least this was one reason – without them, we could not cope with the problems of industrialism and the intellectual demands of modern science. These had broken into the texture of our social life and threatened to destroy it. Social activities were no longer subsidiary to the old framework of home, village, community, town organization, and national government. The old framework rather was – as it increasingly is – being swallowed up, or twisted, or, at the best, reshaped by our new social activities. In the Middle Ages this was not the case. The texture was there, changing and becoming more intricate, but unbroken, except by war and plague which made it seem all the more precious and inevitable. In the eyes of wise men it was alive in every part, alive with moral opportunity. It was the task of the good to see that its life was preserved, that the useless and rebellious threads, so to speak, did not entangle it."<sup>20</sup>

Such a testimony from a non-Catholic source does, I think, force us to be mindful of our Catholic and medieval inheritance.

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<sup>18</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1946, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Powicke, *Christian Life in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1935, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

But to return. In the distressful times of the invasions it was as much as the monastic and cathedral schools, those “scattered islands of knowledge in a sea of ignorance and barbarism,”<sup>21</sup> (in Haskin’s phrase) could do to hold on to the bare essentials, viz the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers. When conditions became more normal, secular learning was increasingly cultivated both for itself and as a help to the sacred writings.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the standard fare of education in the early middle ages was the *Trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the *Quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy).

These studies were, on the whole, rather superficial; and it was not long before intensive work was being done in certain fields. Bologna in civil and canon law, and Paris in theology and philosophy soon established a pre-eminence in these fields, not seriously challenged in the middle ages. It would be a mistake to imagine these institutions as narrowly confined to their specialities; both were many-sided universities. Bologna’s great reputation in the field of law was due mainly to the work of Irnerius [flor. 1100-1130]. Roman law, however, had not died out as a consequence of the barbarian invasions, only to be discovered by Irnerius; its revival as a legal science was common to all parts of northern Italy. Rome, Pavia, and Ravenna were great centres of legal study; and even at Bologna there was a law school before Irnerius.<sup>23</sup> Yet Rashdall affirms that “unquestionably it was his lectures that first raised Bologna to European fame” to make it not merely “a great school of law” but “*the* school of law par excellence.”<sup>24</sup> From Irnerius’ time dates the endeavour to go behind the law to find the fundamental principles which transcend the numerous local applications. It marked the abandonment of the study of Roman law as a “literary exercise”<sup>25</sup> for an attempt to establish a philosophy of law.

Mention must also be made of the *Decretum* of Gratian [c.1140]. Coming as it did shortly after the Concordat of Worms (1122) this codification of church law was a tremendous help to the learned world. Originating in Bologna, it further strengthened Bologna’s claim to leadership in law studies, while itself gained wider reception through the prestige of Bologna. In short, “Bologna owed its fame as much to the canon law as to the civil law.”<sup>26</sup>

The direction which Paris took towards theology and philosophy was foreshadowed by the work of eminent scholars, none of whom were university men, but rather preceded the university: William of Champeaux, Anselm of Laon, Abelard, Peter the Lombard, John of Salisbury, to name but a few. Philosophy received its greatest impetus from the Aristotelian revival, of which John of

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<sup>21</sup> Haskins, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, Oxford, 1929, p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 34, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 114, 115.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 136.

Salisbury was one of the pioneers “and perhaps the first to realize the philosophic importance of the ‘New Logic’, especially the Topics, which transformed the old scholastic art of disputation into a theory of science and a science of thought.”<sup>27</sup> To Paris flocked students from all over Europe, who were interested in the best and wisest in philosophy and theology.<sup>28</sup>

Another difference between Bologna and Paris should be pointed out. We are told that Bologna is typical of the lay university, while Paris is clerical; again that Bologna was a student university, while Paris was magisterial. The word ‘lay’ as applied to Bologna must not be used without a warning. “The spirit of Bologna is represented as free, enlightened, anti-papal, anti-clerical, revolutionary. Paris is regarded as the home of narrow bigotry, theological conservatism, and ecclesiastical despotism. Such a representation arises from the importation of modern ideas into a period in which they were quite unknown. .. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, religion exercised at least as powerful an influence upon human affairs in Italy as it did in the north of Europe.”<sup>29</sup> However much we put tags upon various universities, however much the universities wrangled among themselves, however much their student bodies gathered into ‘nations’, there still remained supreme above all, a religious ideal. “Viewing themselves as members of the same spiritual family, using a common language to impart to others the same fundamental truth, those medieval scholars succeeded in living and working together for about three centuries, and so long as they did, there was in the world, together with a vivid feeling for the universal character of truth, some, sort at least of Occidental unity”<sup>30</sup> – thus Professor Gilson.

To return to our young student whom we left pondering in his inn room. It is hardly possible that he can afford the hospitality of his present quarters and he must now seek out more permanent lodgings. In the early days he would be left to shift for himself. It was enough for the university to look after the intellectual needs, without becoming involved in housekeeping problems. The rich students lived well enough at the inns, surrounded and protected by their personal servants. The poor lived in dismal garrets, drafty and unheated, trying to get enough to live on and pay their fees, by begging or copying or taking notes for wealthier and lazier students.<sup>31</sup> Between these extremes was the large body of students who lived in student clubs in some rented building or with their masters. These student clubs, wherein the students elected one of their number as rector, were more common in the Italian universities. Though frequently wrangling among themselves, they were able to present a common front to exorbitant townspeople

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<sup>27</sup> Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 1949, p. 223.

<sup>28</sup> Its international reputation is well attested by Prof. Gilson, who finds among the important Parisian doctors of the thirteenth century, not a single Frenchman. Cfr. Gilson, *Medieval Universalism*, 1937, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 136, 137.

<sup>30</sup> Gilson, *Medieval Universalism*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Haskins, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, p. 63.

and to force the latter to moderate rents and food prices, on threat of leaving – no idle threat. However, there were advantages in living under the wing of the master, and in benefiting by his counsel and advice. And as universities became more organized the trend was to concentrate students in residences where there would be some sort of collegiate life, until finally residence in such for all, save the wealthy, was obligatory. For reasons of discipline, students clubs were frowned upon; and a master, with subordinate officials, was placed in charge of each residence. This meant that the officials, who were more or less responsible to the university, could supervise the studies and check the wild exuberance of youth. Regular repetitions of lectures and disputations became the normal thing in colleges; and the colleges gradually came to usurp some of the teaching functions of the university.

The college, earliest seen at Paris, was originally nothing more than an endowed hospice or hall of residence for poor students. In 1180, an Englishman, Sir Jocius de Londiniis, returning from Jerusalem, was struck with pity for some poor clerks, who were yet fortunate enough to have a lodging in the “hospice of the blessed Mary at Paris for the poor and sick.” He purchased a room in perpetuity in the same hospital and left enough money to house eighteen poor students and to provide them with a small monthly pension. In return for this, “the said clerks should take turns in carrying the cross and holy water before the bodies of those who die in the same house and each night celebrate seven penitential psalms and the due prayers instituted of old.” Thus was founded the Collège des Dix-huit, the earliest college of Paris.<sup>32</sup>

The universities did not cater to the very poor student, who had to beg his bread, and endeavoured to do away with this class. This is reasonable, for the student who must spend his day begging his bread will have little time for studies. However it was not long before intellectual qualifications were preferred to the material status of the student in the colleges generally.

Once settled in lodgings, the student began to look to his intellectual wants. We will suppose that he intends to take his degree in arts. The contents of the arts course varied considerably in time and in place; consequently, what follows will be quite general. The main subject of instruction was logic, with a noticeable omission of the great names of Latin and Greek antiquity. Dean Rashdall reduces the curriculum to very general terms: “for the B.A. – Grammar, Logic, and Psychology; for the Licence in Arts – Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics; for the M.A. – Moral Philosophy and the completion of the course of Natural Philosophy.”<sup>33</sup> In some places there was an attempt to make the *Trivium* and

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<sup>32</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, 155.

*Quadrivium* the basis of the arts course; but this seems rather to have been done out of loyalty to tradition than from a sense of conviction.<sup>34</sup>

As to the manner of lecturing, we are fortunate to have the outline given by Odofredus of Bologna:

“For it is my purpose to teach you faithfully and in a kindly manner, in which instruction the following order has been customarily observed by the ancient and modern doctors and particularly by my master, which method I shall retain. First, I shall give you the summaries of each title before I come to the text. Second, I shall put forth well and distinctly and in the best terms I can the purport of each law. Third, I shall read the text in order to correct it. Fourth, I shall briefly restate the meaning. Fifth, I shall resolve conflicts, adding general matters (which are commonly called *brocardica*) and subtle and useful distinctions and questions with the, solutions, so far as divine Providence shall assist me. And if any law is deserving, of a review by reason of its fame or difficulty, I shall reserve it for an afternoon review.”<sup>35</sup>

As a general rule, lecturers were not to dictate or read their lectures. Furthermore, they were to speak rather quickly, so that the student could not copy them down. This was not meant to be a popular edict; for it was necessary to prescribe in the same regulation that “listeners who oppose the execution of this our statute by clamor, hissing, noise, throwing stones by themselves or by their servants and accomplices, or in any other way, we deprive of and cut off from our society for

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<sup>34</sup> The classrooms were for the most part bare halls, with or without seats for the pupils. We can learn much from Buoncompagno's rather wistful picture of an ideal classroom. “A school house built in fresh pure air, far from the concourse of women, the cries of the market-place, the neighing of horses, and the barking of dogs, from shipping, from harmful gossip, from the squeaking of carts and from smells. A good number of windows, with neither too much nor too little light, but as nature herself requires. A school room (*habituaculum*) on an upper floor, with a roof not too high nor lying too near the floor, for each of these defects hampers the working of the memory. It should be cleaned of all dust and dirt, with no pictures save perhaps those which fix in the memory forms and figures relating to the studies on which the mind is engaged: the walls painted green and only one door and easy stairs. A master's seat set so high that he can see all who enter; two or three windows so placed that, especially in fine weather, the master can see trees and gardens and orchards, for the memory is strengthened by the sight of pleasant things. The scholars' seats so arranged that everyone can see the master easily ... Everyone to sit in order and not to change his place.” He adds: “I never had a house built like this, nor do I think that such has ever been built anywhere. But this idea of mine may perhaps be of some use to those who come after me.” [Powicke, *Christian life...*, 90] The actual conditions seem to have been much the reverse of Buoncompagno's ideal room.

<sup>35</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

a year.”<sup>36</sup> Repetitions of the day’s work were usually held in the various colleges; at first, optional and voluntary, they had a definite advantage in the days when texts were few and libraries almost non-existent, and soon became of obligation.

The ‘ordinary’ lectures, given by a master, were held early in the morning. ‘Cursory’ or ‘extraordinary’ lectures and reviews were reserved for later in the day or for feast days. They were delivered mainly by bachelors, though occasionally by masters, and were designed to elaborate points which could not be covered in the ordinary lectures.

There were no term tests and the final examinations were immediately directed towards the degree.<sup>37</sup> In the December of what we may call this final year, the student had to undergo a preliminary test – the *responsiones* – to ascertain his fitness to take part in the public *determinatio*. This test, conducted by a master, covered the fields of logic and grammar. If successful, the student was admitted to the *Examen determinantium* or *Baccalariandorum*, held in the following January or February. The board of examiners, appointed by the student’s own nation in the university, had not merely to examine him in the contents of the prescribed texts, but also to ascertain that he had completed the necessary residence and had attended the lectures in the prescribed subjects. This latter usually consisted in accepting the student’s oath and his master’s assurance. From the censures against bribery and perjury, we must conclude that some masters, for a consideration, were willing to cover up for delinquent students. The successful scholar was now allowed to proceed to the determination.

The examinations already described were merely preliminaries to the determination. During the Lent following the *Examen determinantium*, the young bachelor for forty days had to take part in a series of public scholastic disputations. Every effort was made to have a large and distinguished audience. Indeed, a determiner’s friends have been known to drag in passers-by from the street to make up in numbers what was lacking in quality.<sup>38</sup> Finally, the series of disputations ended in a banquet – at the determiner’s expense.

Hitherto, all examinations had been conducted by the student’s nation or college. As yet, the university proper had not taken any part in the proceedings. Undoubtedly, some students stopped at this stage, content with their *baccalaureate*. But if one intended to make teaching his profession, he must have the licence of the university chancellor. From this point affairs were handled by the university; and of course, an examination was prescribed. As pre-requisites, a candidate must have completed five or six years of study, have heard all the books set down by the faculty, and have reached the age of twenty.<sup>39</sup> After this, he was examined by the chancellor (or his deputy) and four examiners appointed by the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>37</sup> In what follows, I have merely tried to summarize Rashdall.

<sup>38</sup> Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 455.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 456.

chancellor. The ordeal consisted, in part, of a lecture, after which the bachelor would be questioned on any point arising from the lecture. The convocation, which followed, was a rather formal affair, with the university officials and the bachelors in full academic dress, marching in solemn procession. Each bachelor was presented to the chancellor, and kneeling, received from him the solemn licence “in the name of the Trinity,” to teach in the faculty of arts, together with the apostolic benediction.<sup>40</sup>

But the *baccalaureate* was only a half-way mark in his career. His final was the ‘inception’, which normally occurred about six months after the licence. On the eve of the day set for his inception the bachelor participated in a solemn disputation. Then on the morrow, he received his magisterial biretta, gave his formal lecture in the presence of the faculty, and then sat with the masters. This was the crown of his career; it signified his entrance into the ranks of the masters and their acceptance of him as a colleague. The day closed with a banquet and gifts to his fellow-masters and guests.

Assuredly some mention must be made of student life but I shall be brief. There is a wealth of material on this subject, which although it is interesting cannot be considered as very important. The wandering scholars and the goliards, with their ‘wine, women, and song’ were, according to Powicke, “not the real thing, and they did not last very long. The real thing was more prosaic – a boy or young man bitten by the desire to learn, hard put to it for money, or supported from the revenue of his church by a bursary or prebend, in the hope that he would come back to be a credit and a strength to it.”<sup>41</sup>

Parents of modern college boys and girls will recognize the essential sameness of human nature in the letters of the medieval students. The common burden of these letters is, naturally, the request for a little more money. Occasionally there is a slight variation, as when one student sent a pitiful note to his married sister, begging for some money and clothes. When the letters were not asking for money, they usually told of the sobriety and industry of the writers. Two letters from Professor Haskins’ article may be of interest:

“...I have had the good fortune to obtain lodgings with a certain citizen who has two boys in school and provides me with food and clothing in sufficient amount. I have also found here an upright and worthy master, of distinguished reputation and varied attainments, who imparts instruction faithfully; all my fellow pupils, too, are modest, courteous, and of good character, cherishing no hatred, but giving mutual assistance in the acquirement of knowledge and in honour preferring one another.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 461.

<sup>41</sup> Powicke, *Christian life...*, p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> Haskins, *Medieval Culture*, pp. 16, 17.

and again:

“...This is to inform you that, by divine mercy, we are living in good health in the city of Orleans and are devoting ourselves wholly to study,...We occupy a good and comely dwelling, next door but one to the schools and market-place, so that we can go to school every day without wetting our feet. We have also good companions in the house with us, well advanced in their studies and of excellent habits... Wherefore lest production cease from lack of material, we beg your paternity to send us by the bearer money for buying parchment, ink, a desk, and the other things we need, in sufficient amount that we may suffer no want on your account (God forbid!) but finish our studies and return home with honour. The bearer will also take charge of the shoes and stockings which you have to send us, and any news as well.”<sup>43</sup>

The replies also have a familiar ring. After commending his son’s industry, the father may caution him to spend his money more wisely; after all, his uncle was able to go through the university with far less money, and besides there are other children to support.<sup>44</sup>

For obvious reasons, the letters of medieval students say little about the wilder side of university life. There seems to have been plenty of this, even when one allows for some exaggeration by medieval preachers. As Professor Haskins writes, “whatever their other virtues, the students of medieval Paris were not distinguished for their love of peace and quiet. Theirs was a rough and violent age, and what with the prévôt’s men and the townsmen, the monks of St. Germain and the friars, there was no lack of opportunity for a brawl, in which the students were only too likely to be the aggressors.”<sup>45</sup> It may well be that modern college athletics have a point in that they divert this ebullient spirit from the many to the few. There was no organized recreation. Apart from the spontaneous brawling, casual, informal gatherings in taverns for song and drink seem to have been the favourite occupation of their free time.<sup>46</sup> There were, as Haskins has so nicely put it, “none of those outside activities which are the chief excuse for inside inactivity in the American College.”<sup>47</sup>

It is high time to draw this paper to a close. I am exceedingly aware of many things left unsaid and of many that could have been better said. If the case for the medieval university has been poorly made, assuredly the fault is mine. In its own

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Haskins, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64, n. 5.: “hoc maxime faciunt ebriosi quales sunt Parisius multi et maxime Ybernici, qui quicquid scribendo in septimana conquirunt, totem una die potando consumunt. Nec de hoc corrigi possunt.”

<sup>47</sup> Haskins, *Rise of the Universities*, p. 5.

world, the medieval university enjoyed an assured place as a life-giving principle of Christian society.<sup>48</sup> *Sacerdotium, Imperium, Studium*: these three were the life of medieval society. It would be difficult to mention any great intellectual figure of the middle ages who had not either studied or taught at a medieval university: saints and sinners, orthodox and heretic have rubbed elbows and joined battle at Paris, Bologna, Oxford, and a host of other places. From this battle of wits and intellects has come “the critical intelligence and restless spirit of scientific enquiry which have made Western civilization the heir and successor of the Greeks.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “Hiis siquidem tribus, scilicet sacerdotio imperio et studio, tamquam tribus virtutibus, videlicet vitali naturali et animali, sancta ecclesit catholica spiritualiter vivificatur augmentatur et regitur” : an unknowr German c. 1280; quoted in Rashdall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, p. 229.