

T H E S I S .

Subject, Schools of Charlemagne.

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Charlemagne, king of the Franks^{and} emperor of the West, was born in 742 and died at Aix-La-Chapelle in 814.

He was one of the greatest monarchs that ever reigned and was no less distinguished in history of education than in political history. Though from his earliest youth, a great and impetuous warrior, he fully realized the importance of the educational interests of his empire. It was his plan to elevate the Franks^{and} Germans to an educational level with Italy^{and} Ireland, which excelled the world of letters at that time.

He appreciated profound learning and was anxious to attract to his court as many scholars as possible. Although he succeeded in get-

ting nearly all the distinguished men of the eighth ^{and} ninth centuries to his court, he was never satisfied, - always aiming at higher results. But the men, he secured, were employed as instructors and political advisers; some of whom were sent to Pepin in Italy to superintend the prince's education; others remained at home and were organized into a body known as "The School of the Palace."

When at Italy, Charlemagne met a monk, by the name of Alcuin, and secured his services in his famous "School." Alcuin was forty-seven yrs. of age and thus his scholarship and character were already developed.

Being seven years older than

Charlemagne, he was at such an age as to be a learned adviser and guide to the king, and at the same time not too old to interfere with sympathy and companionship.

The condition of learning at this time was deplorable. Whatever traditions had found their way from early Gallic schools into the education of the Franks, had long since been scattered in the disorders, in the times of the Merovingian Kings. Thus Alcuin had no easy task before him; for the court school was not only composed of untutored minds, but embraced among its pupils the youthful princes and princesses, and at the same time theirsel-

ness, so that it is a great proof of Alcuin's tact that he was able to interest and benefit a circle, the individuals, so different in nature.

His instruction was conducted largely by the method of question and answer, often preparing answers and questions alike beforehand. The necessities of his position demanded not only all his tact but unceasing activity also.

We should all have enjoyed looking on, while the "School of the Palace" was holding one of its morning sessions. We should see the great Emperor seated on a highly ornamented chair, which served as a throne, with his sons and daughters near him, and

the nobles, such as were allowed the privilege, a little lower down in the room. And there standing among them, we should see Alcuius, lecturing on grammar, rhetoric, astronomy, and theology.

Besides these lectures there were times when the young people were taught reading and writing, which were considered as rare accomplishments in those days.

It is said that the Emperor tried very hard to write, but never made much advancement, although he carried tablets in his bosom, on which to practice, at odd times. His fingers were too much used to holding the sword to be very skillful with the pen.

Reading, too, was much more difficult before the art of printing was known, as all books were copied by hand with a pen, and were scarce ^{and} expensive.

In his love of learning, Charlemagne reminds us of Alfred, the Great, of England; but having been a man of war in the early part of his life, he never became as well informed as Alfred, who was always a student. During the time when he was not at war - after he became Emperor - he tried to get all the knowledge he could, by having people read aloud to him at his meals, so as to never lose a moment of time; but at this age it was

slow work.

Another excellent work of Charlemagne was his establishment of elementary schools for the free instruction of children and the laboring classes.

Some writer has said "History presents to us few more striking spectacles than that of the great monarch of the West, surrounded by princes and princesses of his family and the chief personage of his brilliant court, all content to sit, as learners, at the feet of their Anglo-Saxon preceptor, Alcuin, in the 'school of the palace' at Aix-La-Chapelle."

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